

The second coming of

# **Christ**

The End of Dogmatic Religion and  
the Emergence of Global Spirituality

**Muzi Cindi**

A twenty - fifth wedding anniversary publication

**The second coming of Christ:  
The end of dogmatic religion and  
the emergence of global spirituality**

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## Dedication

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*This book is dedicated to all people who love God, find it difficult to love God, seek a God to love or see no reason to love God because of the ugly Punitive Father image of God presented to them. To all those who struggle with the greatest questions of life: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?*



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# Christ Power

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Look at him!  
Look not at his divinity  
But look rather, at his freedom  
Look not at the exaggerated tales of his power  
But look, rather at his infinite capacity to give himself away  
Look not at the first-century mythology that surrounds him  
But look, rather, at his courage to be,  
His ability to love; this freedom; this life; this being;  
And, when you are accepted, accept yourself;  
When you are forgiven, forgive yourself;  
When you are loved, love yourself.  
Grasp that Christpower and dare to be yourself  
Not knowing who we are, we walk in darkness  
The ancient ancestors of the human race,  
Each night brought something of terror and devastation  
No Street lights, No candle lights, No neon lights  
Darkness!  
A darkness that our primitive forbears could not dispel  
Not surprisingly, whatever hurled back the darkness  
Became the object of worship  
The sun, the moon, the stars, and fire  
The worshipped symbols of light versus the demonic powers of  
darkness  
The Prince of Darkness reigned supreme  
In the distortions of the purpose of God's creation

When Christians tell about the birth of their Lord,  
 They speak of a powerful light  
 That split the darkness of night: "A light to the Gentiles."  
 A light is born in the night  
 Born is a life, whose power of love dispels darkness,  
 Banishes demons, heals sickness, restores life  
 Calls people into a new creation  
 His is a life that reveals what all life was created to be:  
 Free, whole, giving, loving  
 "In him was life, and his life was the light of men and women,  
 And his life shines in darkness,  
 And the darkness cannot extinguish it."  
 Love restores life to its true purpose  
 And light is revealed when love touches us;  
 And enables us to grasp our humanity,  
 Fulfil our potential, live our destiny.  
 "I am the light of the world  
 The one who follows me will not walk in darkness  
 But will have the light of life."  
 Jesus Christ reveals;  
 The Source of Life, the Ground of Being  
 The Power of Love;  
 And so we worship this life.  
 We worship him by living his freedom,  
 Sharing in his being,  
 Giving his love;  
**and we call him Lord!**  
 I stand in awe of this life, this Christ,  
 Who is all that life is meant to be.  
 Jesus of Nazareth is Son of God,  
 Begotten, not made, light of light,  
 Very God of very God!  
 My awe and my reverence for this life can,

And does easily become worship  
    Jesus and Christ:  
    They are not the same.  
    Jesus was a person;  
Christ is a title, a theological principle.  
    Christ is beyond history.  
    Jesus was of history;  
    Christ is beyond history  
    Jesus was human, finite, limited;  
Christ is power divine, infinite, unlimited.  
    Jesus had a mother and a father,  
    A human heritage, he was born and he died.  
Christ is beyond the capacity of the mind to embrace.  
    To be in Christ is to come alive.  
    To be in Christ is to turn on to life,  
    To discover the fullness of living;  
To be in Christ is to know the power of love,  
    To experience freedom, wholeness, being;  
    So immense is the power of Christ,  
    So deep is his appeal that;  
    At every stage in life,  
    We seem to see him from a different angle,  
    To see him with new insight;  
Our Christ is like sea beneath the sun; ever changing, yet ever the  
    same!  
    The reality I call God;  
Is beyond the power of the human mind fully to grasp,  
    Beyond the ability of human words to capture,  
    Beyond the feeble attempts of human beings;  
    Even to completely describe.  
We grope after the truth, and we see only through a glass darkly.  
    And who is God?  
    He is not a being in the sky;

Who thinks and acts;  
Who feels and directs.  
God is the Source of life;  
So, God is seen wherever life is lived,  
And God is not alien or separate from that life.  
God is the Source of Love;  
So, God is seen wherever love is shared,  
And God is not alien or separate from that love.  
God is the Ground of being;  
So, God is seen wherever one has the courage to be,  
And God is not alien or separate from that being.  
In Jesus of Nazareth;  
The fullness of life is lived,  
The depth of love is shared,  
The courage to be all that one is; is revealed;  
So, Jesus reveals life and love and being.  
Jesus reveals God  
And, whenever God is seen in human life,  
We call that power **Christ!**

## Preface

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*“God’s truth is so profound that no one religion can ever encompass it. We Christians are still trying to understand the mystery, the depth, and, the profundity of Christ. The Bible itself says some extraordinary things - John’s gospel says this is the light that lightens every one; it doesn’t say only Christians”*

*Archbishop Desmond Tutu*

Just like I did in my previous books, I also begin this book with a pre-emptive apology. I wish I could do otherwise as this book is full of controversy. I apologize for the un-orthodox and non-traditional ideas in the book. I am merely responding to a felt calling to re-invent God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit for my generation and the generations coming after me. It is my poetic theology on Jesus Christ, as opposed to the rational and revealed theologies of the past. It is thus a deeply subjective and intrinsic theology. The former two theologies turned theologians and Pastors into advocates who had to defend what is written in the constitution (the Bible). This discouraged new and innovative thinking in the church. The old adage goes, “If you cannot stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen.” The heat that comes from the contestation of ideas is all over this book. This is the genre of all Reformations in a rapidly changing world. Christianity is changing very rapidly, and this book gives the *how* and the *why* of this evolution. We are living our Christian lives on the other side of

Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, and Darwin. Our new anthropology is forcing us to develop new theologies. We are leaving behind theologies that are based on antiquity anthropologies and primitive cosmologies. Christianity is entering a new exciting age and a new consciousness. God is part and parcel of the new emerging Christian consciousness. Some people are desperately trying to hold on to or restore the old Christian theologies but are finding to their dismay that it cannot be done. The substance of traditional Christianity is melting away, slipping through our fingers as we try hard to hold on to it. Christianity as we have known it for the past two thousand years is coming to a gradual end. It is indeed the end of the world as far as the traditional Christian worldview is concerned. The Christianity that we have known all our lives is fast slipping away from our grasp. Many fundamentalists think they can turn back the clock; but they cannot. We therefore hear a lot of fundamentalist Christians praying to God to “bring back those happy days,” not realizing that God is actually bringing a new day. When I told my “postmodern” daughter I was writing a book titled *The Second Coming of Christ*, she protested that this is very controversial topic. I responded by saying that the purpose was to resolve the controversy. The New Reformation is upon us.

### **Welcome to the New Reformation!**

You and I are very fortunate to be living at a day and age where we see the New Reformation unfold before our very eyes. This New Reformation is very similar to the very first Reformation; which gave us the first century of Christianity. That was a revolution that totally transformed the religious order of the day. I then have to warn that this book is post-Christian, un-orthodox, and highly heretical. Wikipedia defines heresy as, “*proposing some unorthodox change to an established system of belief, especially a religion...heresy conflicts with the previously established opinion of scholars of that belief system.*” I have defined myself as a self-confessed heretic out of this definition. All of our theologies are heresies, in a sense, we “*see things imperfectly as in a cloudy mirror*” (1 Cor. 13: 12). “*All prayers blaspheme*”, said CS Lewis. I therefore do not have absolute certainty about my theology but a proper humble confidence in God. I am one that is called to speak as a prophet to my generation and prepare this generation for the spirituality unfolding before our eyes, a spirituality for the new millennium. I have rightly sub-titled this book, *the end of dogmatic religion and the emergence of global spirituality*. Spirituality

is the name of the new religion. The most basic definition of spirituality is a search for the sacred. This search can take the form of theism, atheism, or non-theism. My search is the atheistic one. Theism is a belief in the external *Theo* – God, atheism is a belief in a non-external *Theo* – God, and non-theism or *materialistic atheism* is a belief in no *Theo* – God. The Judeo-Christian religions like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam belong to the first form of spirituality and number about 3 billion people. Buddhists, Hindus, Shinto's, and other eastern religions belong to the second form of spirituality and also number about 3 billion people (these are people who experience bliss or transcendence in meditation and do not attribute this to contact with God. They assume that such states are natural to humanity and can be learned by anyone who lives right and who learns the proper spiritual techniques). The rest, including agnostics is made up of the third category. In Africa we had ancestral worship long before the advent of theistic and atheistic religions. This proves that the search for the sacred has always been intrinsic to a human being. I value my personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ more than anything else. This is my heritage. I desire to follow Jesus Christ every day of my life, in spite of the suffering entailed.

The great changes in history occur, I believe, not through argument but through *seeing* things differently. Jesus did not tell people what to do or think but invited them to see things with new eyes or the eyes of a child. He was confident their conduct would then change on its own. He appealed not to their reason but their imagination. I also invite you to *see* the world through my eyes. Psychologist Carl Jung once remarked that, “*You always become the thing you fight the most.*” I am careful that I do not replace the current Dominating System of fundamentalism with another dominating system. Hence I will keep on reminding my readers, **Do Not Believe What I Believe**. Endeavour to have your own revelation of God and walk in it to the best of your ability. Dare to be your authentic self. The Lord Jesus Christ of my childhood, the Jesus who is the same yesterday, today, and forever, has evolved in my consciousness. Jesus Christ is the same in an ever changing world. This book is addressed to Christians who have become atheists. These are the people I feel called to minister to. The book incorporates the best of science and the best of religion as we see the marriage of the two transforming our lives and the world. One of the most glorious achievements of the New Reformation is the unification of science and religion. We have

now reached a point where we understand that spiritual laws are actual laws of nature subject to scientific formulation and verification. We now understand evolution as God and us together. As we evolve, our world evolves. We become more loving, more caring, and have more happiness. The book itself and the theology behind it, is therefore truly atheistic and postmodern. The God presented here is truly the God of the future. The future of Christianity lies in the un-orthodox understanding of God. We might as well come to terms with the fact that Christianity is evolving and will continue to evolve without the traditional understanding of God. My story, like the story I told in my previous book, *Thinking about- God-Talking about*, is about the death of traditional Christianity and the birth of a New Christianity. I am therefore reaching out in love to Christian atheists. In my previous book I quoted Thomas e' Kempis, the 14<sup>th</sup> century mystic, saying: "*If you fancy that you know many things, and fairly understand them; remember that the things you do not know are many more than those you know.*" The evolution of this book has been occurring over the past twenty years (unknown to me). I can trace this revolution to the year 1988. I say more about that year later. That was the year when I felt betrayed by the Bible, betrayed by those who interpreted the Bible to me, betrayed by those who told me they spoke for God, betrayed by the Church, and betrayed by the whole religious system that was behind the Church. I felt that I belonged to a religious system that was making me transmit my pain instead o transforming it. It left me with a lot of unanswered questions. How do we move from a religion that has made us transmit pain for so long? I had to turn to Catholic Priest, Father Richard Rohr, for answers:

Is your religion helping you to transform your pain? If it does not, it is junk religion. We all have pain – it's the human situation, we all carry it in a big black bag behind us and it gets heavier as we get older: by betrayals, rejections, disappointments, and wounds that are inflicted along the way. If we do not find some way to transform our pain, I can tell you with 100% certitude we will transmit it to those around us. We will create tension, negativity, suspicion, and fear wherever we go. Both Jesus and Buddha made it very clear to their followers that "life is suffering." You cannot avoid it. It is no surprise that the central Christian logo became a naked, bleeding, suffering man. At the end of life, and probably early in life, too, the question is, "What do I do

with this disappointment, with this absurdity, with this sadness?” Whoever teaches you how to transform your own suffering into compassion is a true spiritual authority; Whoever teaches you to project your doubt and fear onto Jews, Moslems, your family, heretics, gays, sinners, and foreigners, or even to turn it against yourself (guilt and shame) has no spiritual authority. Yet these very people have often preached from authoritative pulpits.

Today, my self-definition is that of a Christian atheist, heretic, and non-religious. I remain deeply spiritual but belief less. I have lost all my beliefs. I say more about this later. I however remain a person of faith, the post-dogmatic Christian faith that is. I make a distinct separation between faith and believing. I do not write as an orthodox Christian and the book is actually not about traditional Christianity but about emerging Christianity in a pluralistic world. The book is deeply heretical. I thank God I am able to write in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, otherwise I would have long been dragged into a heresy trial, found guilty as charged and burnt at stake, or decapitated; or imprisoned; or disembowelled; or done whatever evil was done in the name of God. For the life of me, I am still perplexed by the idea of being isolated, ostracised, shunned, and treated like a leper just for disagreeing with a holy book! I cannot divorce myself from evangelicalism, as this was suggested by one Christian who asked for “divorce papers” from me. I am called to speak to evangelicals. I responded by saying that God hates divorce. The other day I got an email from a furious fundamentalist lady who accused me of being “demonically duped” (her exact words). She corrected me for saying God forgot Noah on the boat, she said, “The Bible does not say God forgot Noah; the Bible says God remembered Noah.” I rested my case. Historians now estimate that more than twenty five thousand people were killed by the church for making heretical statements; that is, in the first five hundred years of the Church history alone. Some of the creeds, dogma, and doctrines they were killed for are no longer used by the church. They have been ignored or allowed to die unnoticed. Some have been abandoned after confession by the church. Some heretics were later made saints many years after they were burned at stake. But still, the heretics were killed. Heresy is about what the Christianity of the future will look like, and is already beginning to look like. It is about the new global spirituality that incorporates our legacy from the past. It is about the new kind of Christianity and the new kind of

Christians. A new day, and a new chapter is unfolding before our eyes. Some Christians commented that my previous book was not Christian; even though I had mentioned that it was post-Christian. I pray and hope that this book will be read by those who will be helped by it, rather than be antagonized by it. It is not for people are protective of their traditional religious, ideological, or community belief systems. It is for those who are willing to explore new thinking and deeper truths. I am struck by how angry people get when their conventional constitutional reading of the Bible is challenged. There are now fundamentally two kinds of Christianities in the world; one worships a Punitive Father and continues to teach the doctrine of Original Sin. It is a Christianity of fear, power and control, but is slowly dying. The other recognizes the Original Blessing we all received “before the foundations of the world” and recognizes awe and mystery, rather than sin and guilt, as the starting point of true religion. I, for one, would rather be an atheist than worship a Punitive Father.

I know that the new kind of Christianity presented here will be annoyance to Christian fundamentalists. The Jesus presented here is beyond a literal Bible, beyond traditional creeds, beyond doctrines, beyond religious dogmas, and even beyond the Christian religion itself. It is only when we reach this type of “seeing” that we can gaze at the mystery of God, the mystery of life, the mystery of love, and the mystery of being. I see Jesus as the doorway into God; and not the end in him-self alone. *The Second Coming of Christ* will take us deeper into the mystery of God. It only when we are deep into the mystery of God where we discover the love of God that passes our human understanding. We will then know that whatever we do in our spiritual lives; whether its prayer, fasting, giving, loving, or serving; all should be done out of LOVE as the only motivation. Nothing should be done out of legalistic compulsion or even because a certain holy book commands it. The church, as I know it and love it, should not be the 100 percent club of those who have God all figured out, but instead is the food repository where one beggar helps another find the bread that lasts. It should be the hospital where those broken on the wheel of life find healing and hope and the gathering of the forgiven; who are learning how to make forgiveness stronger than hate. It should be a community of those who are glad to come together for Sabbath worship and fellowship, not because they are required to, but because they love it, and they should not be made to feel guilty when they no longer love it. The church should be a house of love and not a court

house where folks come to be found guilty and sentenced (in the altar). Not a place where folks come for altar calls of guilt and anxiety; where people are offered forgiveness and comfort; then creating more guilt and anxiety so that they will need more forgiveness and comfort tomorrow, and so on. This is how the mafia world operates.

## **Death of fundamentalism**

The Second Coming of Christ will see the death of fundamentalism across all religions, beginning with the Christian religion. The Dalai Lama says that, *“we have a bad relationship with our own faith traditions”*. Many Christians, who also happen to be very fundamentalist, do not even know the history of their own movement. Christianity has always been in a flux, it has never been static. It has been growing, revising and evolving. Many Christians do not even know that Christianity became a religion of beliefs only in the fourth century when it was taken over by the Roman Empire. It became a religion of the empire. Fundamentalism has also become a religion unto itself. It is a religion based on control and on the notion that it is in the right while everyone else is in the wrong. It believes that those who follow it will be saved while everyone else is damned. Fundamentalists do not allow other people to think for themselves and make their own decisions. They believe that all people they speak to should believe what they (fundamentalists) believe. They do not give people an opportunity to evaluate things and make up their own minds. Fundamentalists do not like to be questioned. Their utterances are “the word of the Lord” and they are final, to be obeyed without questions. They do not understand what it means “to reason together.” Their truth is the final and absolute truth. Christianity as a religion of power, fear and control, under the mighty hand of fundamentalists, has come to an end. We are at the beginning of a New Reformation, a rebirth of humanity, a new spiritual vision that will focus not on religion but on spirituality. Spirituality is replacing dogmatic religion in the new quest. It is not my purpose to annoy fundamentalists.

Fundamentalism is an attempt to stem a movement whose time has come. No one is immune from the scourge of fundamentalism. We all have to be aware of the demon; atheists and believers alike. Fundamentalism is quite a fascinating phenomenon. There are fundamentalists who are very fundamentalist about their fundamentalism. Then there are those who start a dialogue by saying,

“I’m not a fundamentalist” then get into fundamentalism as things hot up. If you desire to protect traditional and childhood evangelical beliefs; you are a fundamentalist. This book will annoy you. I have deep sympathy for my evangelical colleagues who are still fundamentalists. Having once experimented with fundamentalism, I know the vigour that drives it. Fundamentalist Christians have long believed that we should be a nation whose political life is based upon and governed by their interpretation of biblical and theological principles. If the church believes drinking to be a sin, for instance, then the laws of the country should ban the consumption of alcohol. If the church believes the theory of evolution conflicts with a literal reading of the Bible, then the public schools should tailor their lessons accordingly. If the church believes abortion should be outlawed, then the legislatures and courts of the land should follow suit. If the church believes certain things are wrong then the state should follow suit. If the church has a theology of apartheid the laws of the country should legalize it accordingly. If the church believes in slavery, the state laws should act accordingly, etc.

The sibling rivalry that erupts from fundamentalists is often the nastiest of its kind. It is the kind of Cain and Abel dispute. It does lead to killings. It is a fight over the proper way to sacrifice to the God we both worship. This Cain and Abel hatred is very deep amongst the fundamentalists by themselves. What hope is there for those who are outside fundamentalism? The late Jerry Falwell used to be a fundamentalist who came from the Baptist background. He was a strictly Calvinist fundamentalist. He therefore did not believe in speaking in tongues. He once remarked that when Christian Pentecostals shout, groan, and speak in tongues, it is probably because they have eaten some badly cooked fish. Judging by the bizarre statements made by Falwell in the past, one wonders what he had drunk before making such statements. Some will wonder what I ate before I wrote this book. The Cain and Abel saga continues till today in the Church. For every hundred people who are positive about my book there were two fundamentalists who thought I was possessed by some demons. The attacks from the minority cuts very deep though. After the vicious attacks I endured from some Christians I pondered Jesus’ words, *“Don’t waste what is holy on people who are unholy. Don’t throw your pearls to pigs! They will trample the pearls, then turn back and attack you (Matt. 7:6).* Phew! Jesus! This is harsh language man! On a lighter note, I suggest that those who oppose this

postmodern gospel must be accursed, similar to St. Paul who suggested that, those who opposed his gospel be accursed.

I also know the difficulty and almost impossibility of dialogue with fundamentalists. Intra-faith dialogue, as opposed to interfaith dialogue, is the hardest and most painful task to engage in. It can get very tiring. I have found it much easier to have interfaith dialogue with Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists, and even atheists. You never have people standing on their feet, raising their voices, their faces changing with anger, stomping out of rooms in anger, and finally breaking all contact with you. I never fully understood this kind of behaviour until I heard Dr Andrew Newberger, a neuroscientist, talk on the brain and belief systems. He suggested that our brains are automatically wired with a certain belief system. He suggested that when a belief system is challenged the brain transmits waves into our adrenalin thus arousing violent emotions or flight emotions deep within our psyches. We then adopt a fight or flight posture. We define the other as a heretic or rebel and make an unconscious decision to avoid or fight them. We will either run away from information that threatens our cherished beliefs or will fight those who are messengers of such beliefs. This is how religious and political violence develops. Challenged belief systems automatically create an “other group” mentality, an “us” versus “them or him” mentality. The old adage goes, “if you cannot deal with the message, shoot the messenger.” This is then followed by feelings of “he must be eliminated” from “us.” The Neuroscientist also suggested that being a member of a group, even a randomly chosen group, brings with it the feeling that “my group is better than the other one.” Males feel that they are better than females and vice versa. Christians think they are better than non-Christians and vice versa. Evangelicals think that they are better than non-evangelicals; then, – my church is better than the other church. This extends to race, tribe, nationality, etc. We, human beings are inherently prejudiced creatures. In our Christian tradition we use the term “chosen,” meaning better, the implication being the other is “un-chosen,” therefore material for elimination. When I hear Christians use the words “chosen generation” I think of the biblical atrocities perpetrated by the “chosen generation” since the writing of the Bible.

## Atrocities of “The Chosen”

The tribal God of Israel under whose name the Egyptians, Philistines, Canaanites, and other nations were viciously attacked is still alive and well in the twenty-first century. The “chosen” have divided the world into members of their own small nation called “us” and the “un-chosen” ones called “them.” Just watch this mentality as described by American Christians when they go to war with “them,” how they ask God for protection in their war with “them.” We are tribal people to our core. I think of South Africa, which was itself inflicted by an Apartheid “Christian regime” that unleashed horrendous suffering over the majority blacks, by the “chosen,” all in the name of the Bible and God. This system of Government was theologically approved and supported by the Church in the name of being “chosen”. It was read into our Country from the Judaism story of land conquests. Our conquerors even had a religious name for our country. It was called Die Vaderland (Father’s Land), from the Abraham story of being given land. White South Africa Christians saw themselves as somehow re-enacting the biblical story of the Israelites entering the Promised Land – which in this case was South Africa. They saw God granting them this fruitful land. Because they were so sure of this, just like the Israelites, they had no qualms about robbing, enslaving, or killing the people living in their conquered land. The same biblical story was re-enacted in the whole of Africa. Colonialism in Africa was unleashed in the name of the Bible and the Biblical God. The British, French, Belgians, Italians, Portuguese, Germans, and all other European empire states (who are today atheistic), also saw themselves as God’s “chosen” people, with a divine mission to occupy large parts of the world so that they could convert them to Christianity. In fundamentalism there is no God who makes the “sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt. 5:45). There is no God who “is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked” (Luke 6:35). The only God known in fundamentalism is the one of “us” against “them,” slaves and masters, conquerors and the conquered, etc

For this reason, there was slavery where more that 30 million Africans were sold as slaves, still by “Christians” who would sing praise songs on the top deck of their ships while thousands of slaves were squashed like sardines below them. Some would die in their thousands before they even reached their destination. In South Africa

we had our Truth and Reconciliation Commission where there were confessions by whites who had killed thousands of blacks. It was confessions like, *“We believed in Apartheid. We believed that Apartheid was of God. We believed that the Church was used by God.”* I guess that if all the colonial slave masters, all those who raped in the name of the Bible, and all those who killed heretics can be woken up, they would make similar confessions, *“We believed what we did was of God.”* I know ask you reader, *“What is it that you are doing today, and think it is of God?”* The idea of a chosen nation has become more and more spiritualized over the past 300 years of evangelicalism. Christians are constantly reminded that they are “God’s chosen people”, and encouraged to see themselves as having a special mission in the world – an idea that creates the kind of self-righteousness and intolerance that is against the teachings of Jesus Christ. I love God very much. I find God very lovable. It is the God of organized religion that I hate so much; the God of the book; any holy book. After my visitation I knew that it was my calling to spend the rest of my life talking about the God who visited me. This is the reason why I am so radical. When I hear Christians use the words “chosen generation” I think of the biblical atrocities perpetrated by the “chosen generation. I think of helpless Palestinians and their daily misery under this “chosen” belief system. New Testament scholar, Professor Walter Wink has also suggested that belief systems can be strongholds and powers that hold us down. Belief systems are our life. We are our belief systems. Rene Descartes is famous for saying, “I think therefore I am.” I have changed that to, “I believe, therefore I am” I am a sum total of my beliefs.

The language of Christian fundamentalism is one of “us,” the chosen “us,” against them, the un-chosen “them”. Fundamentalists evoke from me a deep sense of sadness. They lock themselves into something they will very soon have to extricate themselves from. Theirs is a losing battle. They remind me of the zealots who had to deal with the revolutionary, new and unpopular message that Jesus brought to the Jewish nation. The Gospels make interesting reading in the light of the opposition to the new thinking in this emerging new spirituality. Fundamentalists find themselves in exactly the same 1<sup>st</sup> century situation in our 21<sup>st</sup> century. They behave exactly like Paul before his Damascus experience. They are the zealots trying hard to hold on to that which is passing away. We just see history repeating itself. They do not only have to fight the scepticism that comes from

the evolution of new thinking, they also have to fight doubts that arise from within their own spiritual journey. Fundamentalists have turned Christianity into a Pagan cult. It was the emerging church writer Thomas Haubstadt, who asked in a recent article: "How Do We Know We Are Not in a Cult?" He answered this question by basically saying that; "*you are a cult; if you believe you have all the answers and, if you believe truth can be contained or absolutely defined.*" This goes across all religions. I recently sent this internet message to a Moslem fundamentalist:

You need to give up this bizarre belief system that makes you think the Koran is the infallible word of God. Give up the belief that only you Moslems are spiritual people, God speaks to Moslems only, and only Moslems can make true moral judgements. This kind of a belief system is dangerous to your mental health. It would be better for you to be an atheist than to hold such a bizarre belief system.

Someone said that if you have a heart it is inevitable that it will be broken. There is the old saying that sticks and stones break my bones but words break my heart. As I was writing this book, I remembered that I have had to prepare for the possibility of my heart, again, being shattered by another incoming barrage of unequivocally the most hateful, hurtful correspondence I have *ever* received --- from self-proclaimed Christian fundamentalist zealots, 21<sup>st</sup> century Cain brothers portending to be defenders of what is right, correct and true. I had to prepare my heart again for charges of heretic; deceived; anti-Christ; son of Lucifer; deceiver, etc. I got emails charging me with being "demonically duped" and "visited by a demon."

I have come to terms and accepted as part of the price of my new quest that I will be criticized, misunderstood and even verbally abused by the closed-minded, fearful defenders of the God of yesterday; those who still think that the word blasphemy still matters in a post-modern world. Isn't it strange that, in the 21st century there are people who still share a concept of a God who can be blasphemed by a human being? How many times was Jesus accused of blasphemy? How many times did the orthodox accuse him of blaspheming God through his utterances? Jesus was extremely crazy and extremely subversive. He was also accused of being demoniacally duped. (Matt. 9:34) Jesus was actually accused by those who should have received him gladly. He was attacked by those who should have defended him. He challenged

their cherished beliefs. This is exactly what the New Reformation is doing to the established religious authority. To follow Jesus is to go the way of the cross. The way of the cross is very painful and lonely. It leads to death. I am speaking from experience. Fundamentalists are obsessed with, the love death (necrophilia), rather than, love of life (biophilia). Mathew Fox says this comes from the wound inflicted by the Punitive Father. Denigrated people always denigrate. Hated people always hate. Abused people always abuse. Punished people always punish. Fundamentalists cannot envision God outside his punitive mode." *All fundamentalists have father wounds*", Fox says. For this very reason, when fundamentalists talk about bringing back "family values," those same values are enshrouded in a Punitive Father. The great mystic Meister Eckhart observed that "*all the names we give to God come from an understanding of ourselves.*" To believe in a Punitive Father is to believe in our own guilt and our own need for punishment, which we then project to others. Guilt and punishment go hand in hand, making for "good" religion (based on the deep need for salvation), but the two are very dangerous sociologically and psychologically, as Brian McLaren has observed in, *Everything Must Change*:

An errant religion often functions like the mafia, which promises security and protection for a fee; but if you don't pay the fee, it promises to destroy you. Instead of "protection rackets," religions often become "forgiveness rackets," creating guilt and anxiety and then offering forgiveness and comfort, but then creating more guilt and anxiety so that you'll need more forgiveness and comfort tomorrow, and so on.

Dominican Priest, Matthew Fox, tells the story of a counsellor he knows, who has worked a great deal with alcoholics. The counsellor says alcoholics often give up their chemical addiction when they "find God," but unfortunately the God they find in fundamentalism is often a Punitive Father. The result is this that they return to alcohol abuse.

*"...you cross land and sea to make one convert, and then you turn that person into twice the child of hell you, yourselves are!"*  
(Matthew 23:15)



## Chapter 1 - Introduction

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*“Only when we no longer fear  
do we begin to live”*

*John Powell S.J.*

I first would like to take this opportunity to review one of the most insightful books on the current Reformation sweeping the Church and the global world. I have been fascinated and transformed by this book. It is truly the epic summary of the life's work of one of the most profound theological thinkers and teachers for the past 50+ years — an American one at that. It was written by the distinguished Professor of Religion at Harvard University, Harvey Cox. There's something happening here. The words of that old song (the glory of the Lord like a sea) reverberate within me when I think of the events happening in our world and in the Church. Harvey Cox, who has recently retired from the faculty at Harvard, has delivered a seminal work on his take on where Faith is; Has Been, and Is Going. The coming age is Cox's hope and read on the future. This, he is calling the Age of the Spirit. He points to many things, too numerous to lay out here, but essentially the role of women in the church has moved away from the male-centred images of Christ and even God to explore further the ways of the Spirit.

Also the large numbers of people who have started to identify themselves as spiritual but not religious signals a lack of trust or concern for the institution of the Church. People are realizing that they can have fellowship with each other and God without a mediating influence such as clergy or rote belief systems. But by and far the most interesting part of Cox's thesis for this reader was his harkening us back to a time when faith did not require one set of beliefs over another. Creeds, statements of

beliefs, etc. etc. serve only to divide Christians one from the other, he says. They serve to build walls within the house and each denomination or church or community sits walled off from their brothers and sisters not because they lack a faith in Christ but because they hold different beliefs about that faith. Cox sees these belief systems and their current use in hot button topics in culture, as the rear guard in a system that is fading away.

Professor Cox begins the book with a question: “*What does the future hold for religion; and for Christianity in particular?*” Cox proceeds by guiding us through three phases of the evolution of Christianity: The Age of Faith, The Age of Belief and the Age of the Spirit. Throughout each phase he provides an incredibly rich context for the points he is illuminating. This approach gives the texture of the book one that is logically presented, easy to follow — and maintains the reader’s hunger for more. I found I was unable to put it down and when I did, came back hungry for another helping. Where does Cox end up at the conclusion? Listen to these excerpts:

All signs suggest we are poised to enter a new Age of the Spirit and that the future will be a future of faith... Faith is resurgent, while dogma is dying. The spiritual, communal and justice-seeking dimensions of Christianity are now its leading edge as the twenty-first century hurtles forward, and this change is taking place along with similar reformations in other world religions.

Yet, it would be inappropriate to simply leave you with the bottom-line conclusions of this epic contribution. It is the richness of the writing, the masterful, insightful weaving of history, and the sharing of attention grabbing wisdom that accompanies the reader throughout this entire book, that makes it apparent that you are in the midst of a story being shared by a very wise and learned friend. Allow me to share a few more excerpts to illustrate this important point:

People turn to religion more for support in their efforts to live in this world and make it better, and less to prepare for the next.

Professor Cox makes an important distinction between faith and beliefs throughout the book while weaving the weight of history into support his positions. His comments make belief-less Christianity a viable option indeed. According to him:

*Faith* is about deep-seated confidence – vital for the way we live – it is primordial – hope and assurance that translates into the way we live our lives... *Belief*, is more like opinion – We can believe something to be true without it making much difference to us. *Creeds* are clusters of beliefs. Christianity is the story of a people of faith who sometimes cobbled together creeds out of beliefs. It is also the history of equally faithful people who questioned, altered and discarded those same creeds.

*To be a Christian meant to live in his Spirit, embrace his hope, and to follow Jesus in the work that he had begun.* The gospel is always more than we imagine, the Bible always has something for us greater than we expect, and Jesus is always beyond what we can conceive. I'm fascinated by the piece – “Jesus is the image of the invisible God.” I then add unknown and unknowable. Jesus is then the image of the invisible, unknown, and unknowable God. He then is beyond anything a space time, finite human being can conceive. We engage in idolatry when we attempt to box God and Jesus inside our finite boxes of our worldviews, creeds, doctrines, and even our holy books. The current global spirituality sweeping the world across all religions just shows us how wrong we were about Jesus all along. It seems like Jesus has just “jumped” out of the boxes we have entombed him in for so long. We stand on the beautiful threshold of a new chapter in the Christian story – Christians on five continents are removing the residues of the second phase (the Age of Belief) and negotiating a bumpy transition into a fresh era for which a name has not yet been coined. Cox calls it the Age of the Spirit. As we “transition” into this new Age of The Spirit that Cox clearly observes and provides ample evidence to support the said observations, he provides some insights, challenges and suggestions:

How the new can grow out of the old without wasting time trying to dismantle it. Faith is returning to become a primary life orientation — **not** intellectual assent to a box of beliefs, creeds, doctrine and dogma. Christianity came to birth in the midst of a cultural change — it is a movement born to travel – it takes on life with each succeeding cultural transition – But for this to happen again, some old wineskins must be discarded, and the incubus of a self serving and discredited picture of Christian origins must be set aside. The fact that the most fruitful and exciting movements in Christianity today are taking place on

the margins of existing ecclesial structures should not surprise anyone. Historically speaking, “schism” and “heresy” have often heralded the deepening and extension of the faith. Sometimes they are condemned, sometimes honored, and sometimes both, starting with the first and only later ending up with the second. One clear Christian example of the both the renaissance of spirituality and the transmutation in the nature of religiousness is what is being called the **emerging church** (emphasis mine)... A religion based on subscribing to mandatory beliefs is no longer viable. The wind of the Spirit is blowing. One indication is the upheaval that is shaking and renewing Christianity. Faith; rather than beliefs, is once again becoming its defining quality.

What if we could set aside the arguments over beliefs and walk with each other in the faith? This is a question that invites a journey. It requires a review of, what those of us inside the church believe are the requirements for membership. Above all, it calls us to be curious about what God is up to in God's world. Can we do it? In the end, it doesn't matter, these changes are coming. My prayer is that we can take this journey with grace and without inflicting more wounds on the other. Cox has named this awakening *The Age of the Spirit*, author, Phyllis's Tickle has named it *The Great Emergence*, Other Jesus Seminar scholars led by Marcus Borg have named it *The Emerging Christian Way*, Brian McLaren has named it *The New Kind of Christianity*. I decided to name it *The Second Coming of Christ*.

## **My role in the new Christianity**

This book offers hope that the choice between the closed minds of the fundamentalists and the rejection of all religion by the secular humanists will not be the only choices available to my generation; in order for us to be Christians in the 21st century. The wind of the Spirit is blowing where it will, and no one knows where it comes from and where it goes (John 3:8). The wind of the Spirit and evolution are one and the same for me. In science we talk of the force of evolution and in religion we talk of the wind of the Spirit. It cannot be restricted by doctrinal or ecclesiastical boundaries. I consider myself as one called to be an apostle (with a small letter a) of the new kind of Christianity; to interpret Christianity for the twenty first century person. I invite the faithful, the sceptical, and the fearful into a spirit-filled vision of a new kind of Christianity that can

renew a hurting world. This is a book whose time has truly come. I attempt to offer a fresh vision for the resurrection of a new global spirituality that will restore our faith both in ourselves and in the divine. It is about the New Reformation, a revolution that is bringing a total transformation of Christianity. It is about Christianity's new vision of a non-literal but powerfully real Christian view of life. I write to give shape to the vision of the *second coming* of Christianity. We are in the midst of a new reformation; this one will make Martin Luther's reformation look like a Sunday school picnic. The Reformation shook the orthodoxy of the previous 1400 years in the same kind of way the "emerging" church is currently doing. So it strikes me that evangelicals can't talk about a consistent orthodoxy, because what Christians consider "orthodox" is always changing and evolving, and they themselves are a part of that. There's something I've always found strange about the evangelical emphasis on orthodoxy as a fixed truth throughout the ages. Obviously, evangelicalism is itself an offshoot of the Protestant Reformation of the 1500's. The Reformation wasn't just about problems with the Catholic Church, but about a new way of understanding our relationship with God.

As much as there are great developments in the world of technology; there are parallel developments in the spiritual world as well. The science technology and the spiritual technology are at their fastest pace. Christianity is in the midst of a New Reformation. I take a cue from St Paul's wise instruction to Timothy to be fearless and not ashamed of what I am. Though, I do feel like John the Baptist, in the wilderness, announcing the coming of the Kingdom. Like John the Baptist, I cannot "unsee" what I have seen! I am a free person, free to write honestly and fearlessly about my beliefs or lack of beliefs. Someone commented after my recent book that I was fearless, bold and passionate, and wondered how I managed to be this way. I still have some fears lingering in me though; it is no longer the fear of God but the fear of people who are absolutely sure they know who God is. I have met both heaven and hell in people. I fear those who espouse absolute truth. We know the atrocities that have been committed by such people. Our past history is littered with examples of human misery perpetrated out of absolute truth beliefs. A God who demands my fear is unworthy of my worship. Before I get another barrage of emails and sms' describing fear in Kabbalah, Hebrew, Apocrypha, Greek, Latin, Zulu, Sotho, etc. let me hasten to say, I do understand those who still believe in "fearing God," I welcome their relative context just as I expect them to welcome my relative context. No

context is absolute truth. I intend to use my fearlessness in a passionate and directional way instead of being reckless and irresponsible. What you will find in the coming pages is my authentic self that is found at the core of my being. My authentic self is the composite of my unique gifts, skills, interests, talents, insight, wisdom, strengths, and values. I no longer go with the flow due to fears of rejection, being misunderstood, labelled, and being hurt by people. Brian McLaren, in his seminal work on the emerging Christianity, calls the new kind of spirituality and a new way of being human that sees “us in you,” “you in us,” and “some of us for all of us.” He elaborates this further in his book, *The New Kind of Christianity*:

Perhaps now you see why I love Jesus so much. I didn't have this kind of terminology for it...When I described my feeling as a pastor of living in the tension between something real and something wrong, the something real was the inescapable awareness that in Jesus there wasn't simply a red, orange, yellow, green, blue, or violet light. In Jesus, I saw and see not only the coloured light of a particular religion at a particular stage, but the full spectrum light of God.

I no longer believe in Christianity the same way I believe in Jesus. I make a distinction between the two. Christianity and the way of Christ are two separate entities for me. I have discovered the light God has called me into at this very important stage of human civilization. I intend to pursue my calling in this violet zone. This violet zone challenges me. I now look back at all the colours and stages I went through since I gained consciousness. As I get acclimatized to the violet zone I see all the previous zones as adequate and appropriate for their context, just as I consider infancy, childhood, and adolescence as appropriate and adequate for their time, not bad, evil, or wrong. I do not see the new zone of my Christian life as being necessarily *right*; I see it as simply being *appropriate* and *adequate* for the time and season humanity is in now. As I continue to climb my spiritual ladder I can see things from a higher level that I could not see from a lower one. I thank God for the levels I went through, they were important ladder levels that took me to the level I am in. I do not see it as being better than the other ones; I see it as different from the other ones. I do not depreciate the value of the other stages of my Christianity. I see all stages as being good stages and all being stages of perfection and truly authentic. My “born again” was a colour in my spiritual path, so was my Pentecostal followed by Charismatic experiences. I moved on to other colours in my spirituality. The problem

arose when I made my “born again” experience superior to other so called “nominal Christians.” This term became a metaphor that made my Christianity superior to others.

I had a sense of something wrong with my Christianity but did not know this well, when I said in my very first book: ***Do not believe what I believe.*** In my second book I said the reason was because you may not be ready for what I had to say. I can now add the fact that you may have not evolved into my colour. I now can talk of the way I see things; my worldview. My frustration comes from those who have not yet had an experience of the colour I am in but have the guts to even call this colour demonic. A friend sent me a sms advising me that I can only be a first rate of my authentic self rather than be a second rate of somebody’s self. This is the best gift I can give back to Jesus, who also dared to be his authentic self. I feel at peace with my spiritual stage and feel okay that others may not agree with my views. I am at peace with the tensions, suffering, loneliness, animosity, insecurity, and uncertainty that comes with this stage. I cannot hate myself, refuse to be myself, or pretend to be someone else, in order to be loved by the other. I live out who I am. My task, and my ultimate religious task, is to become who I am. I cannot do this in response to fear. I feel that is very important that I state these views, especially in this moment of our history. I therefore take cue from and these wise words from past thinkers:

To be nobody but yourself in a world which is doing its best day and night to make you everybody else; means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight, and never stop fighting. - Poet E.E Cummings.

To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment – Ralph Waldo Emerson, essayist and philosopher.

Do not wish to be anything but what you are, and try to be that perfectly – St. Francis De Sales, Bishop of Geneva.

I desire to be true myself – something that religion made me deny for a long time. I also understand that the true self that I want to be true to; is unknown to “ME”, but only known to the “I” that is not known to ME. It was the distinguished Harvard University Professor, Harvey Cox, who, in his latest book, *The Future of Faith*, revealed to me a part of myself that will be emerging as doctrines and dogma in Christianity and other religions are dying all over the world. Life is a total unfolding mystery to

me. Today's Christians spend their energy in losing battles about such things as authority, scripture, women, sexuality and homosexuality, while they know very little of the history of any of these. I will never fully understand my own sexuality – how do I then go about understanding other people's sexuality, and even making judgements about it. We are very quick to judge a human sexuality that we are not even willing to research. We make judgements on a sexuality we have obviously not investigated; a sexuality of which we have absolutely no understanding. We have not even researched our own sexuality to fully understand it. The late Michael Jackson sang a song that goes like this, *"Before you judge me, try to love me first, and – ask yourself questions about my childhood"*. Mother Theresa once said that if we judge people, we will never have time to love them. No wonder Jesus said, *"The same judgement you pass on others will come to you"*. I have seen that happen in the Church again and again. Was it not the Apostle Paul who, in Roman 7, spoke that about the members of his own body that were beyond the control of his conscious mind? I see "myself as mystery". It was the same Paul, though, who also made judgements on people's sexuality and even intimated that God punishes people by "perverting" their sexuality (Rom. 1:29). Just think on what Professor Walter Wink had to say on the Bible and human sexuality:

The Bible condemned the following sexual activities, which we also condemn; incest, rape, adultery, and intercourse with animals. But the Bible also condemned the following practices which we today either generally allow or at least do not universally condemn: intercourse during menstruation, celibacy, marriage to non-Jews, naming sexual organs, nudity under certain conditions, masturbation, and birth control. Granted, some Christians today still condemn one or more of these things. The Biblical voice of God, however, is regarded as uncertain on these matters today, whereas in the past the Bible was assumed to be quiet clear and debate was, therefore, not allowed. The Bible regarded semen and menstrual blood unclean, which most people living today do not. In this analysis we can see just where and how sexual attitudes have changed and that whenever these changes have occurred, the literal biblical attitudes are set aside. The Bible also permitted the behaviours we today condemn: prostitution, polygamy, levirate marriage, sex with slaves, concubines, treatment of women as property, and early marriage (for the girl aged eleven to

thirteen). While the Old Testament accepted divorce, Jesus forbade it. Out of the sexual mores mentioned here, we only agree with the Bible on four of them and disagree with it on sixteen. The Bible is an ambiguous document about specific sexual practices.

## The phenomenology of man

My own life has been a total mystery. It was the scientist, Albert Einstein, who said that, *“behind anything that can be experienced there is something that our minds cannot grasp, whose beauty and the sublime reaches us only indirectly.”* My mystery, the real “ME” – the ME that I struggle so much to separate from the “I”, is so part of the mystery of the universe that scientist still struggle to understand. I have come to terms that I will never fully understand “the universe within me”, just as I will never understand the outside universe. “I” as a subject will never fully understand the “ME” who is an object. Even though; “I” and “ME” are part of the same person. I often look at my old photos and ask, “Is this ME”, then I say “I have changed” but “I AM still the same person” I am still the same person I was when I was five. I am still the same person I was when still in my mother’s womb! I am still the same “person” I was before I entered my mother’s womb. I am still the same person I was in my eternal past. I will be the same person in my eternity. I meet people I have not seen in thirty years and they ask, “Is this you? You have changed so much!” and I ask them the same question also. But I also ask myself the same question, “Is this me? I have changed so much!” I AM always watching ME doing this, listen to myself speaking to myself and wonder why I am speaking to myself. This was until Martin Buber, in his classic, *I and Thou*, taught me I am not speaking to “ME” but to “THOU”. He says “THOU” is the holy other that lives inside me. “THOU” is for me as a Christian - my Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the mystery unfolding inside me. What lies behind me and what lies ahead of me are tiny matters compared to the mystery that lives inside of me, as Emerson once said it. Christ is definitely incarnated in my body. (John 1:14). I connect with Christ through silent prayers, verbal prayers, meditation, reading, etc

Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), in his classic *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, was the first scholar to talk about the mystery of self. Not only can I watch myself thinking; I can watch myself watching my thinking. I find myself thinking about what I am thinking. I then ask myself why I am thinking about why I am thinking about why I am

thinking. Like a small child I begin to ask the question why, why, why and enter into endless horizons of mirrors reflecting other mirrors reflecting others and so forth. Our “self” remains a mystery, a mystery we cannot stop probing. Professor Cox goes on to suggest that while I cannot fully understand “MY SELF”, meeting another person also can ignite terror or hope similar to the universe that we encounter. Meeting another person can be like entering hell or heaven. Like animals that we are, when we meet other people, we feel the impulse to flee or fight. It is out of this survival mentality all of our fears about "others," our xenophobia and our prejudices arise. It is out of our survival needs that we fight wars, enslave and segregate those who are different, denigrate women, abuse homosexuals. That behaviour religion has dubbed "sin," the result of "the fall." Other people, outside of our selves, are also part of the same unfathomable mystery. Every time I meet a person, I breathe a little and ask myself how this person will be mysterious in one way or another. Like theologian Albert Schweitzer has said:

In everyone’s life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who kindle the inner spirit.

The way in which the Jesus story is told must be rethought when we no longer see ourselves as people created perfect in God’s image, who then fell into sin through an act of disobedience that corrupted all human life (this is said to have necessitated a divine rescue operation accomplished on the cross). We are rather, incomplete people still emerging out of billions of years of evolutionary history, who need no rescue but the power to escape our survival mentality and to achieve a new consciousness of our oneness with God who is the source of life that is within us.

In always pray that I should be one who kindle the inner spirit in the other. Other people open a dimension of reality that is outside of us. I have met so many people who opened up new realities and opportunities for me. I do not know how I actually got connected to these people. Sometimes you meet people who revolutionize your most inner being so profoundly, you take moment of breath and think and question how they came into your life. Life is such an unfolding mystery! We begin to wonder who they are, where they come from, why they are in our lives; the same questions we ask about ourselves, and continuously find it harder to answer. Were all these developments planned “before the

foundations of the world?" YES! What about the millions in I saw in India who are literally ravaged by poverty? Am I embracing the theology of pre-destination because it suits me? Life is a series of endless questions. We ask questions about the anguish of life. We ask these questions until the questions themselves anguish us. This is what makes us human beings and not robots. What of the power of our subconscious mind? You can ask yourself the same questions on how you got to have this book in your hands. Why are you reading it now and not in the past? We are no longer willing decision makers of our lives. We live our lives 24/7, either in our conscious states or in our unconscious states. The casual people that we meet in our conscious state every day enter our subconscious world and we later dream about them when we are sleeping (in our unconscious state). This is where I have serious problems with the Bible or any other holy book. I now have to say that the Bible is right and Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939), the founder of psychoanalysis, was wrong. I have to say the same about Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Einstein, and Darwin.

Every day I thank God that I am an atheist. Atheism is not a denial of the sacred but a rejection of a particular conception of God. I reject all gods that are rejected by atheists. I no longer believe in a literal and limited God of my upbringing. The God I worship today does not resemble the God with whom I grew up. The Christian God has over the years been presented to me as a God who hates thinking people; a God who is on a mission to punish thinking people. I no longer believe in that definition of a Christian God – I am therefore guilty of the charge of atheism. I wear this badge without any shame. I am on my own Abraham journey out of the modern gods. Like Joshua of old, I say "*choose you this day who; you are going to serve*". If you are okay with the God or gods of your childhood, it is okay. The new Reformation is pioneered by atheistic scholars and atheistic Christians. God just keeps on doing "a new thing". Karen Armstrong, in her insightful book *A History of God*, has demonstrated that Jews, Christians, and Muslims were all at one time accused of being atheists when their ideas began to challenge the popular religious wisdom of the day. There was a time when I identified my concept of God with God. When that concept was challenged, I used to think God was challenged. I was however an atheists for a long time, unaware, as far as other God's are concerned – Muslim God, Zeus God, Olympus God, Buddhist God, Hindu God, Baha'i God, Shinto God, Ancestral Gods, etc. For many, many Christians these Gods do not exist except for the one Christian God. For other religions, like the Muslim

one, all other Gods including the Christian one do not exist except for Allah. Thus the adage; there is no other God but Allah and Muhammad is his Prophet. I was not aware of this until after my visitation of 17 August 2007. I became atheistic of the Christian God on 17 August 2007. On that day I discovered that beyond the “gods of men and women”, the gods made in the image of men and women, the gods that can be spoken of as existing or not existing, the gods that are said to have a beginning, the gods spoken of as being in our image, gods that can be defined within space and time, the gods that can be defined in human language, I discovered THE GOD. I discovered that GOD IS! *“I am who I am and I will be who I will be”* Exodus 3:14 (Amplified). There is a new image of God evolving in the consciousness of humanity globally. This is the God of the future, the one Lloyd Geering talk about in his book *Tomorrow’s God*,

...calling us from a world yet to be created; But, to create this world, this God has no hands but our hands, no voice but our voice, no mind but our mind, and no plan for the future except what we plan...

## Chapter 2 - The postmodern God

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*There was a time in Western society when 'God' was an essential part of the everyday vocabulary... But in the West and among educated people throughout the world, this kind of God-talk has virtually ceased... People once knew, or thought they knew, what they meant when they spoke of God, and they spoke of him often. Now, in the course of the day's business we may not mention him at all. The name of God seems to have been retired from everyday discourse.*

*John Macquarrie*

A God who created the world a mere six thousand years ago is no more. This God has been taken away from us and destroyed by both the march of time and the explosion of knowledge. Many still live their lives on Sundays with a universe created six thousand years and spend the rest of the week with a universe created fifteen billion years ago. In our new evolving postmodern theology, God is not about a being; definitely not a being made in the image of men and women; nor men and women made in its image. God is also not a literal person, made in our image, sitting in a throne in a certain place. That traditional understanding of God has passed away for many and is passing away for some. I experience God as the consciousness that flows through my being. I experience God as life fully lived, as love

wastefully given, and as being fully realized. I deeply believe in God though I find it difficult to put that belief into words. I am quite sure neither I nor anyone can tell another who God is or what God is. I experience God as life, love, music, and whatever is my ultimate concern. I experience God as evolution. I am a truly God-conscious person every waking moment of my life. I always pray Meister Eckhart' prayer: ***God deliver me from God.*** I always pray that God (the un-definable one) deliver me from the God I can define (the idol I named God). I make a distinction between God and the invisible idol I have named God. When God is an idol, God then becomes an idol I can die or kill for. Those who believe also believe that they can die for their beliefs. Anyone who can die for a belief can also kill for that same belief. A Christianity of beliefs is passing away. I cannot die or kill for something I am unable to define. In an ironic sense, I sometimes feel I am dying, or being killed for my new beliefs. My personal spiritual journey has made me to be a deeply infused, God-intoxicated, human being; who no longer have words to describe the God "in whom I live, move and have my being" (Acts 17:28). Mine has become a "religion without religion", to use the words of Italian Philosopher, John D Caputo. I can never divorce myself from religion, I doubt if any other human being can. The word, religion is like a swear word sometimes. I prefer the word spirituality. I love the Bible without the Bible. I love God without God. I love church without the church. I still proclaim the God of mythical Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as my God. The same God is also the God of the philosophers and atheists. Like Abraham, who took the plunge into the uncertain tomorrow, I also go out in faith. Faith for me is; the courage to be, to act, and to live. It takes persons of faith to dare, to confront the world, to enter new closed doors, and to answer the call to go out to a new strange place, not knowing where it is. I have discovered that my faith produces abundant power when I put it in action.

Depth psychology and Eastern mysticism alike have spoken profoundly to me on the death of the ego. I had to let my ego die, be crucified to the illusion that my ego is the centre of my psyche and my beliefs. I now use Paul's words to describe myself thus:

I (in the Greek, *ego*) have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I (the ego) who live, but it is Christ who lives in me (the true self). And the life I (the ego) now live in the

flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:19 – 20).

My spiritual journey has evolved into one where I continue to affirm my desire and love for God but have become critical and even suspicious of all historic faiths claims. I usually say, ‘**Do not go where I have been!**’ In India I was told by the Hindu scholars that the Vedas (Hinduism’s holy book) was the word of God. In Malaysia and other Muslim countries I was told the Koran is the word of God and Muhammad has the original with him in heaven. In China I was told that the Tao Te Ching is the sacred text. In Israel the Jews told me the Talmud is the word of God. Surprisingly, I went to Thailand and discovered that Buddhists do not worship any God or external deity. When Buddhists experience bliss or transcendence in meditation, they do not attribute this to contact with the supernatural. They assume that such states are natural to humanity and can be learned by anyone who lives right and who learns the proper spiritual techniques. I thought back on my Christian upbringing and worldview before I got exposed to such a pluralistic universe with such diverse beliefs by at least five billion people who are not Christian. It was an exposure that broke my single worldview and bias on the Bible. How do I then come back home and continue claiming with honesty that only OUR Bible is the word of God, others are fakes? Actually, all faiths believe that there is only one true and correct faith – that just happens to be their particular faith and its particular holy book. Therefore I repeat, ‘Do not go where I have been!’ I am aware that some people are able to live inside a single worldview from beginning to end – from birth to death – without breaking their worldview. They never question their worldview. They never get out of their ship that they were launched on. They live and die inside the box they were born in. It has not been so with me. Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) once remarked that as soon as we are old enough to look around, we find ourselves on a ship that has already been launched. The ship I found myself on when I gained my self-consciousness is the Judeo-Christian one. My beliefs hardened inside this ship. Had I been born in Iran, China, Japan, or India, I would have found myself on a Moslem ship, a Buddhist ship, a Shinto ship, or a Hindu ship. I would then have not been a Christian atheist but a Hindu atheist or other. My frame of reference and beliefs would have been different. I only discovered later in my life that there were other big ships cruising alongside mine. I was told the other ships were fake copies of my ship. My ship was

original, the true copy. As I matured more, my personal spiritual journey within the same Judeo-Christian ship diverged. I now live the questions themselves. My Christianity has evolved into one of questions rather than the one with all the answers. Answers will come by themselves as I continue on the journey. My journey has made me understand that there is no neutral platform, no place where I can stand outside of all them and make comparisons and judgements. I comment more about this journey in the next chapter.

Before I formed you in the womb I knew *and* approved of you (as my chosen instrument), and before you were born I separated *and* set you apart, consecrating you; (and) I appointed you as a prophet to the nations... Jeremiah 1:5 (Amplified)

I wrote this book because “God” told me to write it. I do not normally use this kind of language when I communicate. In my previous book I used the language “I needed to write it”, I am aware that I am now using a stronger language and expect to be “burnt at stake” by my emerging church friends for using such language. When I hear TV evangelists use this language I find myself praying to God to deliver us from a God who tells people some of the things I hear on gospel TV. I therefore need to explain what I mean by “God told me”. I need to add that when I say “God told me” I’m actually becoming very provincial. I say this from my worldview my perspective and my world. I cannot write from any other perspective and worldview except mine. I make a difference between God and what Carl Jung called “our God image”. We all use our “God image” to talk about God. When I define God, I am actually not defining God; I’m defining my God image. This is true of all us, isn’t it? We all speak from our heads, our contexts, and our truths. We cannot get out of our heads. I got an email the other day saying, “You guys in postmodern theology say the God of theism is a god created in the image of men, are you not also creating the postmodern God in your image?” I thought that was a brilliant, thought provoking question. I responded by saying that even in postmodern theology we are speaking from inside our heads. We will always talk about God “from inside our heads – our God image” as long as we live in our time-space universe. Maybe when I die I will get out of my head and talk about God outside of my head. I will then talk about God – not “through a tainted glass, but with perfect clarity” (1 Cor. 13:12). It is only in death where I will know

the ultimate and absolute truth. For now, I cannot get outside of my head, I do not know of anyone who can, unless they are mentally ill. I went further to add that the theistic God has become incredible to the postmodern person. This God has been taken from us and destroyed by both the march of time and the explosion of knowledge. The postmodern concept of God will one day also be overtaken by time and the expansion of knowledge in the right time.

I hope you will find it in your heart to tolerate the context of my truth just as I accept your context of truth. That is unless you believe that your context of truth is the ultimate absolute truth. We are all human beings limited by space and time. We all write and speak from inside our heads. It is also true of all biblical writers and the writers of all other holy books. They all wrote from the scientific understanding of their time. They all wrote from their heads. What they wrote from their heads has evolved over time. It has not stayed the same. I am writing from the scientific understanding of my time. I am writing for genuine seekers of truth, not for those who are simply looking to reinforce their bias. The word “prejudice” means to pre-judge. As you read this book, I hope you will lay aside all your prejudices, and with an open , consider the facts, the evidence, the logic, and then make up your own mind if what I am saying here has any ring of truth. Keep your eyes open and look around at our fastest evolutionary pace ever.

The critical study of the Bible shows us that human beings evolved from worshipping animating spirits, to a God whom they were even afraid to call by name and therefore used vowels (YHWH), evolved further to calling God a Father, then the Son (Jesus) in the modern era and the absolute spirit, divine intelligence, energy, etc. in the postmodern era. We have truly entered the age that is now called the Age of the Spirit. Our religion has evolved into a new spirituality. In this new spirituality we do not deal with absolutes, we only deal with metaphors. The name ‘God’ is a temporary metaphor that we use because we do not have any other universal metaphor to use. There are several events, working together over a period of time, which led me to write this book. These events go back to more than twenty years back. I will discuss these events in detail as I go along. The most recent event that really brought this book into your hands was a question that a certain Pastor asked. The Pastor asked my friend, Jackson Khosa; “Is Muzi still in the Lord?” I told him to dig deeper into the context of the question next time. Jesus used to answer

questions with questions. Next time you hear such a question ask the reciprocal question, “Which Lord?” In my spiritual journey so far I’ve discovered so many ways of being “in the Lord”. When someone asks; “Are you still in the Lord?” I’m tempted to ask “Which Lord, which context, because I am in evolution”. As I keep on climbing the ladder of my spiritual path to “be in the Lord” keeps on taking on new contexts. So, if you ask me if “I am still in the Lord,” you will have to give me your context of “being in the Lord” for me to give you the correct answer. I cannot imagine myself being “out of the Lord,” unless I read the words of Jesus differently.

When I hear people talk about Jesus Christ, I often wonder which Jesus Christ they are talking about. I no longer have a narrow tribal definition of Christianity. Christianity is more, far-far more, than its popular public voices have told us. There is not one correct version of Christianity and 1<sup>st</sup> class Christians. In Greece, a country that is 80% Christian Orthodox, I was told by my guide that, “we orthodox believers are the 1<sup>st</sup> class Christians; Catholics are 2<sup>nd</sup> class because they broke away from us, and Protestants are 3<sup>rd</sup> class because they broke away from Catholics”. I asked, “What about us who broke away from the other breakaways of Protestants?” I no longer desire to be a 1<sup>st</sup> class, 2<sup>nd</sup> class, or even third class Christian. I welcome my heretical badge and my critics help me a lot in this regard. I no longer subscribe to yesterday’s popular Christian assumptions and definitions. The Christ I worship today does not resemble the Christ I grew up with. The reality of Christ has gone beyond the definition of Christ to which the majority of church people still pledge their allegiances. The Christ of my childhood has evolved; the Christ of my adulthood has evolved. Christ is evolving further as my knowledge expands. I have now discovered that there is actually a “supermarket” full of different brands of Christ. This book is about another brand of Christ; the cosmic Christ. It is thus very difficult to answer a question when I do not understand the context in which it is asked. I will therefore use this chapter of this book to outline its contents. It is not my intention to do away with anyone’s faith or religion. I still value the importance of religion for the maintenance of a human being’s security system. I’m not interested in taking away anyone’s religion and leave them insecure in this vast and complex universe.

A claim to possess absolute truth is there for security reasons. It brings a lot of anxiety and insecurity to have a feeling that one does

not have the absolute truth. I have embraced the insecurity of knowing that there is no absolute truth out there. We have to get out of our constraints of space and time to discover absolute truth. Our creeds and doctrines have for years told us that we can tell people who God is or what God is. We have believed that God can be defined and we have defined him for people in a very fundamentalist approach. When I talk about God I am no longer talking about an external being. I am no longer talking about a being made in my image or I made in its image. My childhood God and my adulthood God were made in my image. The biblical God is made in the image of men. It cannot be otherwise, it is human beings who wrote the Bible. If this sense of awe and transcendence was experienced by horses, then God would be a horse. If it was donkeys, God would be a donkey, a snake, a cat, a mouse, etc. Because it is humans who have been touched by this sense of self-consciousness God is made in the image of men (and women). The God in our consciousness will always change. God has always changed and will always change – only in our human perception. Even the current postmodern understanding (others say it is atheistic) understanding of God will change one day, maybe after another six thousand years or sooner. The current evolution of God is at its fastest rate and everything is changing with this evolution. Even the idea of the second coming, which is the title of this book, is changing in our consciousness. I do believe that Darwin's thinking will finally force the Christian Church to alter the way it talks about God, Jesus, salvation and human life. When that insight finally dawns on the Christian consciousness, the result will be a reformation so total that it will put the Reformation of the 16th century into the category of an afternoon tea party.

Just over a hundred years ago, a German man now described as the prophet par excellence of the new age, Friedrich Willem Nietzsche said these words, *“if you wish to strive for peace of soul and happiness, then believe: if you wish to be a disciple of truth then enquire.”* My previous book was about the deconstruction of God, God as He is now conceived by a postmodern person. It was about a postmodern theology of God. This book flows from the understanding that God is no longer a metaphysical being living above the sky. God is a part of who I am and a part of who you are. We live in God and God lives in us. We are moving from this understanding to talk about Christ. What did the ancients have in mind when they spoke about the second coming of Christ. We already know in our postmodern

theology that there is no literal coming from the clouds as there is no God above the skies. We know there is no heaven above the skies where Christ ascended to and no hell below the earth where Christ descended to. The universe is not a three storey building where Christ can make several trips up or down. I often wonder how many return tickets Christ has. We hear that the anticipated coming is actually not the only one. There is supposed to be another one after seven years and another after a thousand years and so on. This book is about another deconstruction. I actually like the word 'deconstruction'. To many it is tantamount to destruction. This is the main accusation levelled against the emerging church conversation. "You guys are out to destroy Christianity", is the accusation we often hear. This is the same accusation that was levelled against Martin Luther and the reformers five hundred years ago. It is the same accusation that was levelled against Jesus by the Pharisees.

Jesus was accused of subversion by the Pharisees. He was said to be undermining the status quo and making people uncertain. People love certainty. We love myths and find them immensely satisfying.

I no longer write as a conformist. I do not conform to any religion or belief system. I have developed my own philosophy of life that I live by. I have my own principles and vision that is aligned to my spiritual journey. I now read the Bible and interpret it in line with my own spiritual path. I have found my purpose and am determined to live my life on this purpose. I now live my life driven by passion and purpose. I know that this may sound self-focused and self-centred. I can only give what I possess within me. I cannot give to my generation what I do not have. I can only give what is happening inside the core of my being. I do not want to impose my God and my spiritual path on anyone. I am a postmodern mystic. To the mystic, the God of one person is never quite the same as the God of another person. It was Carl Jung who observed that "it is only the mystic who brings creativity to religion." I read a lot of mystics. I find them fun and inviting me to have fun. In the mystical tradition no one can claim objectivity for his or her own insight. Each person is called to journey into the mystery of God along the pathway of his or her own expanding personhood. No one person in our universe can ever exhaust the revelation of God. "All paths lead to God, for God is on them all equally for the person who knows," said the antiquity mystic, Meister Eckhart. I desire for each and every one reading this book to

find God for self. You cannot walk my journey as I cannot walk yours. You cannot carry my cross as I cannot carry yours. Allow whatever is contained in this booklet to be signposts in your own spiritual journey. May this book contribute to our shared knowing so that the coming generations will know ways to live peacefully on this earth. I therefore offer these three wise guidelines:

1. Do not believe what I believe
2. Do not go where I have been
3. Come! See the world through my eyes

I see myself as already living the ethos of the coming global spirituality. Jesus Christ is for me the centre and the hope of this global spirituality. God, the incarnate Christ, is manifesting across all religions in an unprecedented way. I have fully embraced the new postmodern theology of God. The god of the church, synagogue, and temple is no more. The tribal God of a “chosen generation” is no more. God is now in all and for all, through different spiritual paths. God, who has become the source of life, the Ground of Being, calls me to live fully, wastefully, and to have the courage to be myself. So, when I live, love, and have the courage to be, I engage in prayer and worship, I expand my humanity and I break out of all human and religious barriers. Let me take this moment to expand further on the state of my new spirituality. I am not doing this to make you lose your faith; I am doing it to give you a taste of the coming global spirituality. You do not have to adopt my belief system if it will cause to lose faith and lose your God. As a proud African I am concerned that many, many of my brothers and sisters in Africa will die having only known the American God as imposed by our Imperial Superpower. This is after their ancestral worship was taken away from them in exchange for this god.

## **What about Satan**

Indeed what about Satan? When I hear someone mention Satan, I often wonder which concept of Satan they have in their minds. Are they imagining a superhuman boffin, strategist, and planner, with massive computer servers full of information about everyone in our seven billion people of the universe? Does this being work day and night to thwart our plans? I struggled with the issue of Satan for all of

my Christian life until about three years ago, after my spiritual encounter. I now, know what ancient people were experiencing when they spoke of Satan, demons, powers, angels, spirits, and the like. Don Cupitt, the English theologian, has suggested that “the best way to conquer Satan is to give up the belief in Satan.” He is quite correct. I did it and it worked for me. Most of us sleep well at night, no longer anxious about evil spirits or demons that will “visit” us while we are asleep. I no longer “bind” Satan from disturbing my God given purposes. I just do not worry about Satan anymore. I hardly talk or even think about Satan. That is freedom indeed. I now live like a normal person; I thank God everyday for this. I have outgrown my childish talk and behaviour. No one told us to believe what we believe today about evil powers. It is just a shift in our consciousness. I highly recommend the following books by Professor Walter Wink: *The Powers that be: Theology for a New Millennium*; *Naming The Powers: The language of Power in the New Testament*; *Engaging The Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*. Professor Wink is an activist who has marched through Chile, South Africa, and the streets of New York identifying and then unmasking the powers and exposing the domination system they represent. He has identified the world dominating systems that are characterized by unjust economic relations, and the use of violence to maintain them all; very similar to the American Capitalist system.

Professor Wink has given us a simple typology of the worldviews that have shaped human existence over the past six thousand years. I have adapted and summarised it like this :

- *The Ancient Worldview*: This is the worldview reflected in the Bible. In this conception, everything earthly has its heavenly counterpart, and everything heavenly has its earthly counterpart. It was not only the writers of the Bible, but also the Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Babylonians, Indians, and Chinese shared this worldview. Heaven is depicted as being above the skies and Hell below the earth in a three-tiered universe. The earth is flat. Satan (and demons, spirits, angels, etc) is an external metaphysical being, according to this worldview. Millions of believers in the monotheistic religions (Jewish, Christian, Moslem) still hold on and have their belief systems shaped by this worldview. There is nothing uniquely biblical about this worldview; it just happened to be the

current worldview at the time the Bible was written. It is similar to our global technological cosmology today. We cannot say this cosmology is Christian or Moslem or Chinese. There is no reason why the Bible cannot be interpreted within the framework of other worldviews as well, be they New Age, Hindu, Chinese, or any other worldview.

- *The Spiritualist Worldview:* This worldview emerged in the second century, after the death of Jesus Christ. It is called the worldview of the fall. In this worldview, the world is a prison into which spirits have fallen from heaven. St. Augustine popularized this worldview with his doctrine of the fall. Satan is the god of this world, according to this worldview. Saints are encouraged to stay away from the “evil” world and all that is “of the world.” Consequently, sex, the body, and earthly life, and the world itself, in general, were considered evil. It is the worldview that most of evangelicalism is established on. It is reflected in the sermons that place all emphasis on getting Christians out of this evil world quickly, before the evil world is punished by fire like Sodom and Gomorrah. It emphasizes the salvation of the individual and a theology of escaping the evil world. For those subscribing to this worldview, the gospel is a message about the salvation of individuals from this evil world. It claims that the world is coming to a bloody end very soon. The next worldview is a reaction to this one.
- *The Materialist Worldview:* This worldview claims that there is no heaven, no spiritual world, no God, no Satan, no soul; nothing, but what we can know through our five senses and reason. The spiritual world is an illusion. There is no higher self, and when we die we cease to exist except as the chemicals and atoms that once constituted us. It encourages people to create values, purposes, and meaning for themselves, since there is no intrinsic meaning to the universe. There is no right and wrong except what society agrees upon for purposes of survival and tranquillity. This worldview has lately penetrated deeply, even into many religious people. I also find myself struggling to free myself from this worldview. I sometimes find a lot of sense in it. I have off late been reading a lot of books on life after death –

from Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Eastern, and other perspectives to deal with this worldview.

- *The Theological Worldview:* This is a worldview that is a reaction to the above one. Most of the supermarket of theologies and their scholars subscribe to this worldview. Most modern scholars of this worldview have deconstructed Satan and now see Satan as a metaphor for evil. Satan is now seen as the domination system that is over corporate, institutions, countries, and even religious systems. There are hundreds and perhaps thousands of theological schools and scholars that are fighting each other on which one is the correct or authentic theological worldview.
- *An Integral Worldview;* This whole book is about this worldview. It is a worldview emerging from a number of streams and thought: atheism, the new physics, liberation theology, feminist theology, and many other streams of literature and the sciences. Professor Wink has observed that, “*we may be the first generation in the history of the world that can make a conscious choice between these worldviews.*” According to the integral worldview: All Powers are good; All Powers are fallen; and, All Powers must be redeemed. I have to add that; All Religions are good; All Religions are fallen; and, All Religions must be redeemed. This is inclusive of the Christian religion I love so much. This is the reason I have written this book. I am convinced that the Christian religion can be redeemed. According to this worldview, both Satan and God are an integral part of our lives. There is a symbiosis between the two. We need Satan as much as we need God in our spiritual paths. Satan and God both live inside human beings and it is up to the particular human being to decide which one becomes prominent. In my new integral worldview, I have learned to acknowledge and love my own inner shadow. I love my evil side and embrace it. As a result, I am able to love the enemy without, because I first loved the enemy within me. I can tolerate the enemy outside because of the tolerance I have for my inner dark shadow. I love my dark self and have learnt to love the “other” as I love my dark self.

## Chapter 3 - A new spirituality

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I have named this book *The Second Coming of Christ* because deep inside the core of my being I am pregnant with a total transformation of my Christian religion through this New Reformation (pregnancy has its own labour pains). I have discovered that I am not alone in this pregnancy. There are millions of other people within the Emerging Church Conversation who sense this renewal. They share the same feeling that it is going to be something much, much bigger than the first coming of Jesus Christ. It will be a global spirituality that will destroy all tribal religions, including our own tribal Christian religion. The superstructures that have been identified in the common mind of a great majority of Christians for so long, and which have been regarded as the essence of Christianity for so long, the foundations that Christianity has been standing on for so long; all these are crumbling in the New Reformation and this is quite an emotional and frightening episode to many. As I said in my previous book; **this will be a tough fight!** It will involve a lot of pain, a lot of dying before the resurrection of the New Kind of Christianity. I feel called to assist people in plumbing the depths of their own humanity, where transcendence, mystery, being and love are discovered, and to bring those qualities found in the centre of life into the world. I call that centre of life God. We all have different concepts of God. No two human beings can have exactly the same concept of God. No one can say for sure where his or her idea of God has come from, but it is there and it propels us forward or it holds us back. My concept of God is not something to be imposed on others people. Each one of us should allow their particular concept of God to evolve on its own. For me, the name God is no longer about a being. It is about the sense of transcendence that I encounter within time and space. I am part of what God is. God lives in me, loves through me, and empowers me to escape the drive to survive that is in every living thing. I no longer focus my prayers to an external God. The external God “up there” or “out there” has faded from my view. I no longer pray to “our Father

who art in heaven”. I do however ask Jesus “Lord, teach me to pray”. I do this very conscious that the old way of praying is no longer working for me. I now live inside a different understanding of reality. I possess a different experience of both life and the universe. I now know that the skies are empty and there is no divine protector to whom my words are directed. The word – God – has been so abused that atheist can today embrace depth, mystery, transcendence, love, awe, etc and refuse to call this God.

I have to say a few things about prayer in this book even though this is not a book on prayer. The book is itself a form of prayer for me. I am reminded of a Spanish monk who admonished a young man whose mother was sick unto death. The mother stretched her hand towards the son and asked the son to pray. The son told the priest that he could not do it because he did not believe in God. “That is nonsense,” replied the priest. “You do not have to believe in God to pray.” Billionaire Richard Branson tells the story of how his balloon failed thousands of kilometres in unknown space. He says even though he does not believe in God he prayed that the landing will be safe and that there will be people who would come to his help wherever he was going to fall. The prayers were answered and he survived. This shows the difference between faith and belief. Prayer, like faith, is very much primordial than belief. You do not pray because you believe, you pray because you are a person of faith. Faith is more related to love, awe, and wonder. Jews, our faith ancestors, were not people of beliefs. They were people of faith. Beliefs come and go but faith is everlasting. Professor Harvey Cox has suggested that the *Age of Belief* started in the fourth century and has come to an end in the twentieth century. Christianity has now entered the *Age of the Spirit* where Christians all over the world are making an irreversible move away from dogma and creeds. They are breaking down barriers between different religions. Spirituality is replacing formal religion. The Christian world as we have known it has come to an end. It is in this new global spirituality where we have to redefine prayer. We are seeking new seers, gurus, and spiritual directors, to form our new prayer life. Mathew Fox, the former Catholic Priest, has become one of those seers to the new global spirituality. In his book, *Prayer, a Radical Response to Life*, he begins the first chapter by defining what prayer is not.

1. Prayer is not saying prayers.
2. Prayer is not withdrawal from one's culture.
3. Prayer is not acquiescence to a culture.
4. Prayer is not causing God to change our petitions.
5. Prayer is not talking to God.
6. Prayer is not liturgy.
7. Prayer is not an exceptional experience

*Beware of the scribes...these are the men who swallow property of widows while making a show of lengthy prayers. The more severe will be the sentence they receive. (Mark 12:38-40)*

*And when you pray do not imitate the hypocrites; they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. In your prayers do not babble as the pagans do, for they think that by using many words they will make themselves heard. Do not be like them. (Matt. 6:5ff)*

*He who says he loves God (and, one can add, prays to him) and hates his neighbour is a liar (1 John 4:20)*

From these, and many other sayings of Jesus we can see how our modern day churches have replaced the Jewish synagogues. We see how modern day Christians have become like pagans in their spirituality. We again see how Christianity has become a religion that Jesus came to do away with. How Christianity has become a tribal religion for a "chosen people;" the same belief system that Jesus Christ came to destroy. Jews thought God was for Jews only and could be heard by Jews only. Christians think that Jesus is for Christians only and can be heard by Christians only. These are the "belief systems" that Jesus came to destroy in our post-Christian and post-dogmatic world. Jesus was against hypocrisy then, He is against hypocrisy today, He will be against hypocrisy tomorrow. In Mathew 5:23-34 Jesus said:

*...if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering.*

For Jesus, the social dimension of justice is a requisite for genuine prayer. He is saying that if we are too wrapped up in ourselves or too psychologically sick to go out to others or too blind to see that justice is done, then, it is no use to pray. Prayer by whatever name should not take precedence over social justice. Jesus' indictment of the Pharisees in Mathew spares no anger in pronouncing his judgement on hypocrites, blind guides, fools, whitewashed tombs, lawless serpents, brood of vipers, and murderers. We see from the Gospels that Jesus never withdrew from his culture. He engaged and attacked its religious presuppositions, including its prayers. This is the call of the New Reformation. This is what God is calling us to do in our generation. A certain woman went to a prayer meeting and started reading the daily newspaper. The Pastor came and told her not to read a newspaper but pray. She responded by saying, "What am I going to pray for if I do not read my newspaper? I read about the suffering in order to let my heart break with them."

Jesus teaches us that prayer is more doing than saying prayers. Most of my prayers are in doing things for the other, giving life, and life abundantly, to the other than saying prayers on behalf of the other. Doing things that will benefit generations living long after my death, is prayer for me. Prayer is the activity of my life through which God is experienced as life, love and being. Prayer is meeting God, meeting God in life, not beyond life. Prayer is more about who I am are than what I do. Prayer is living out my being, giving, loving, caring, and sharing my life with others. I now see prayer as offering my life and my love through the simple action of sharing my friendship and my acceptance. Prayer is letting the "other" have life and have life abundantly because of what I did for them; much more than what I said. Prayer is keeping coins in my car and sharing them with those who need them desperately. Prayer is helping others to dare, to risk, and to be all that they were created to be. Prayer is my opposition to the prejudices and stereotypes that diminish the personhood and being of another. Prayer is the active recognition that there is a sacred core in every person that must not be violated. Prayer is meeting the daily challenges and circumstances of life with courage. Prayer is a call out of childish dependency into spiritual maturity. Prayer is being present, to myself first then to others, sharing love and opening life to transcendence. Prayer is stillness, silence, solitude, even in the busy life. Prayer is words directed to another and wishing the good of another. I therefore no longer set apart *quiet times* as I no longer assume that God is not found in the busyness of life. I now view my car as a prayer dome. I view the plane as a prayer dome. I spend many hours inside them. I allow

these *quiet times* even in busy traffic jams. I withdraw into silence as the opportunities arise. I no longer view *Retreats* and *Pilgrimages* as opportunities to visit a holy place.

I no longer step back away from life in order to meet with God. I understand well that these disciplines still work for other people. They no longer work for me. A revolution in my prayer consciousness has occurred to match the revolution in my theology. I laid aside the theology of theism and embraced the postmodern theology that now makes me to seek God in solitude. I am doing the opposite of what I used to do. I used to shout to an external God, I now remain silent to the God who lives deep within the core of my being. I use every available opportunity I have to sit, stand, walk, self-consciously inside God's presence. I pray through the reading of books – a lot of books, all the time and everywhere. I bury myself in books and study constantly with the intensity of a seeker. I engage all issues and make notes on all issues that come my way. I do not only read the Bible devotionally; I also read it critically as well. I allow atheists to help me read the Bible critically and listen attentively to their criticisms of scripture. I hear God speak to me through atheists also. I see atheists as Prophets of our time.

Every moment of the day is holy time of prayer for me. Meeting and engaging people, is holy time of prayer for me. Prayer is entering into the pain or joy of another person. Prayer is what I am doing when I live wastefully, passionately, and wondrously and invite others to do so with me or because of me. My life and vocabulary have done a 180-degree turn. I pray without ceasing. I allow destiny to keep on offering me moments to observe; to pray, to listen, to be quiet, to read, to wander, to go through my winter and my summer, to go through my highs and my lows, to explore, to process, to question, to ponder, to doubt, to hope, to get depressed, to come back to faith again, etc. This has become my normal life pattern.

I no longer pray to, “storm the gates of heaven” or “push down walls in hell”. I no longer pray to a God who intervenes from outside the universe to stop calamities inside the universe. The holocausts, genocides, wars, tsunamis, hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, etc have made that God concept fade from our memories. I no longer have that concept of God. I no longer pray to a father figure in heaven, whether mythical, literal or metaphorical. I do not believe there is a being, a supernatural deity, standing over against my world who seeks through some invasive process to imprint the divine will on the life of my world. The God I worship is

part of who I am individually and corporately. I love to pray for people when they can hear my words. I prefer to pray for people in the language that they can understand as opposed to praying in a language that “only God understands”. I prefer them to be a corporate part of the prayers that are directed to them. I do address God as father now and then though. It is my legacy and my tradition. I do it especially when I pray for people who do not share my beliefs. I do it for the benefit of their faith. I do not feel guilty or not guilty about not using this name, of using it. It just no longer matters to me.

Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), a key philosopher and theologian who lived in the thirteenth century, had a profound respect for the mystery of God. He said that God cannot be compared to any other thing, or placed in any category. To categorise is to define and limit according concepts derived from the observable universe, and the mystery which is God lied beyond all these. He said that it was limiting even to place God in the category of things that exist. God does not even fit the category of beings, even the supposed category of spiritual beings; much less the categories of persons, kings, authorities, benefactors, or males. God is much beyond all such earthly or human concepts, and yet, as the ground of all being, contains all the excellence, all the goodness, all the richness, of all these categories, and infinitely more besides. It follows that when I speak of God in a metaphor, as father, king, protector, or any other human language metaphor or title, I am always on the brink of diminishing God. The moment I confuse the metaphor with the reality I then have created an idol, a false god in the image of created things. Hope my little explanation is sufficient for those who are wondering why I could just decide to walk away from the name - God the Father. I have become a postmodern mystic. I have my own personal God experience. Every human experience, however, in order to be shared must pass through the medium of words. There is no other means of communicating content to another. In that process the wordless experience inevitably takes on the dimensions of the human mind with all its limitations. Human beings always reflect the presuppositions of the cultural wisdom of the day. They reflect the level of knowledge that the speaker has achieved. Inevitably they become limited and warped by that transition and are rendered finite and mortal. My experience of God may well be eternal, but no human explanation of that experience will ever be. That is a fact that religious believers in all traditions constantly forget. All sacred scriptures, developed creeds and complex theological doctrines cannot help but compromise truth because nothing about the time-bound words

they have to employ can ever be eternal. In a similar way God is by definition beyond the scope of the human mind, which is always captured in time and space. Since a horse cannot escape the limit of it being a horse to describe what it means to be human, neither can a human being escape the limits of humanity in order to describe who or what God is.

### **The Bible**

I cannot close this chapter without saying something about the Bible – the book of books! I have read this book all of my life since I gained self-consciousness; this means I have been embedded in this book for more than forty years. I have studied it both constantly and deeply when I was still a Pastor. I have read it on differing levels at different stages of my life. I read it as a fundamentalist. I read it devotionally for most of my adult life. I underlined all the verses that seemed to speak to me and never minded the verses I never underlined. I now read it as a scholar; I read it as a believer and a critic at the same time. I go back to those verses I never underlined and enquire why I never underlined them. I write books on the verses I never used to underline. I read it devotionally, I read it critically, and I also read it as a sceptic. I use the best post-modern scholars to read this book of books, so that I can interpret it for the post-modern generation. This is my new calling. I have entered my own age of enlightenment and this has made this thing belief, very complex for me. No one can fully understand religion and remain a believer. Up until the eighteenth century most people viewed the Bible as an infallible authority because they were not aware that there was any other way to view it. The infallible Pope had been replaced with an infallible Bible (a paper Pope). We no longer read the Bible with the innocence of the previous generations. Knowledge has now expanded; we no longer simply accept the Biblical claims without question. No one, in our 21<sup>st</sup> century can believe anything *exactly* in the same way as someone living in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Our 21<sup>st</sup> century scientific mind questions even the term “word of God” in a culture in which people are encouraged to think for themselves, a culture where ideas are presented as points for discussion rather than decrees to be obeyed. A society that understands “values” better than “commandments”. There are just too many Scriptures in the Bible where we will simply not be able to say, “This is the word of the Lord”, after reading them. Most of us are now aware that if we had been born in a different country, or even into a different family, we would probably have a quite different set of beliefs, values, and even religion. We would even

be reading from a different holy book. I have thus, shaken off my conception of the Bible as an “authority” and read it from the point of view of entering into the experiences of all Bible writers. It then works as a “word of God” for me. I am very hesitant to call the Bible “the word of God”. I first have to define who God is. I then have to define what I mean by “the word of God.”

I was raised in a frame of belief where I called myself a “Bible believing” Christian. The Bible was my “paper pope”. I did not know then that what Jews, Catholics and Protestants call “the Bible” are different books. I did not know that this book I call “the Bible” has been changing from century to century, with various books being included and excluded depending on the theological climate of the time. There was no Bible in the second century CE. The only Bible available then was the Old Testament. The book of Revelation was only included in the fourth century. The books of first Clement and the Apocalypse of Peter were removed in the third century. I ask my fundamentalist detractors on scripture, Could Peter have had all his books (including removed ones) in mind when He said, “all scripture is inspired.”? The first English Bible only first appeared in 1611 after Walter Tyndale was burnt alive for translating the previous one into English. He had broken the cardinal law of the time; the Bible was not supposed to be translated. For that reason fundamentalists complained when in 1952 the first Revised Standard Version of the Bible appeared and referred to “virgin” in Isaiah as young woman, as per original meaning.

I was raised in a world-view of a literal Bible. I understood the Bible literally all of my Christian life. I now know that literalism is not the only way to understand words. Words are also pointers to a truth which they cannot articulate. I now know that words are symbols designed to free the mind from culturally imposed straitjackets. Religion's quest for security seems to dictate that if something is not literally true, it is not true at all. Much of the religious language of both the Bible and the liturgy is non-literal communication. **NO! God is not literally literal.** This is also true of Satan, demons, angels, etc. God is not a personal, thinking, metaphysical being like us (though we are part of who God is). God is beyond all religious systems – including ours. There is no objective God ‘out there’ or ‘up there.’ God is more of an ‘office’ than a person, an empty ‘space’ we enter. We enter this ‘space’ through contemplation, meditation, prayer, solitude, giving, etc. Jesus was not born of a literal virgin, but people met something in him that they did not believe human

life by itself could ever have produced. A virgin birth was the only symbol they had. Jesus was not physically resurrected, but people experienced his life-giving spirit after his death and spoke about him as the resurrected one. Jesus did not ascend into the sky of a three-tiered universe, but those who experienced his power were convinced that since he had come from God, he had to return to God, and so the ascension was the symbol they chose to communicate this truth. Jesus Christ is rightly called “the *visible* image of the *invisible* God” (Coll. 1:15). Liturgy and a literal language are a series of pointers to that which words cannot embrace. I continue to read the Bible to discover the, *deeper than literal* truth, the truth the literal words were trying to point to. This book is based on the *deeper than literal* truth of *The Second Coming of Christ*. The purpose is to let my readers realize that our historic “orthodox” Christianity got the idea of God and Jesus of Nazareth very badly wrong. We are all searching for truth and have the hope that God will ultimately lead us into truth.

As a book deeply influenced by the Judaeo-Christian tradition, it is very easy for us who were raised in this tradition to think that Jews or Christians have a copyright on God. There is no book in the world that has deeply influenced the Church and Christian culture. Theologians and Ministers of the gospel have always read into the Bible the kind of things people of their time and culture wanted to hear, or perhaps, the only things that, within their culture, they *could* hear. We have all been challenged by things we have read in the Bible, but this is different from then saying the Bible is *in reality* the supreme authority the way the Pope was. Any church or faith community that makes the Bible or any holy book its supreme authority ends up being the supreme authority itself. When Pastors say, the Bible is the authority, they actually mean that they or their church is the supreme authority. All people who make these claims will never subject their claims to the enquiry of biblical scholarship because such claims will crumble in the light of deep biblical scrutiny and enquiry. Biblical fundamentalism has never, and will never, survive a genuine study of the Bible. I love the Bible and continue to dig deeper into it for truths that are deeper than the “literal truths” of the past two thousand years. It is the non-literal truths and the mythical truths in the Bible that makes it “the word of the Lord” for me. I love the Bible for the inconsistencies, incompatibilities, and contradictions, hyperbole, and *midrashic* elements that makes me enter into the ancient life and think deeply on the experiences and thought life of those who wrote it and how the concept of God and spirituality has evolved since then.

The Bible has to be kept as it is, with all the original language, inconsistencies, incompatibilities, and contradictions, or else we will lose the value of entering into its ancient thought life. There is a time to read the Bible as the word of God. There is a time to read it NOT as the word of God. There is a time for everything (Eccl.7:1). God is just too big for us to put our arms around him, so to speak. It is impossible for anyone to say for sure what God says or thinks. People who say they know God's thoughts are usually just trying to get a little divine backing for their own views.

The Bible was written between 2000 and 300 years ago. Do you know anyone who thinks that absolute truth can be captured in a 2000 to 3000 year old textbook on any subject? Would you go to a doctor who practiced medicine out of a 2000 to 3000 year old medical textbook? Can we study astronomy, geography, chemistry, biology, physics, calculus, oceanography, anesthesiology, geology, psychology, psychiatry – and the rest of human sciences out of a book that old? Can such a book be a trustworthy guide to the science of our humanities? There are new discoveries in all these fields that can teach us a lot about the mystery and wonder of God's creation, yet we still have Pastors in the 21st century talking down psychologists and psychiatrists. To add salt to the injury, we have Pastors talking down biblical scholars, who are scientists in the field of theology. Whether we like it or not, we are at the mercy of scientists. That is where God is becoming in the 21st century.

Let me close this chapter with C.S Lewis's Footnote to *All Prayers*:

He whom I bow to only knows to whom I bow  
 When I attempt the ineffable Name, murmuring Thou,  
 And dream of Pheidian fancies and embrace in heart  
 Symbols (I know) which cannot be the thing Thou art  
 Thus always, taken at their word, all prayers blaspheme  
 Worshipping with frail images a folk-lore dream,  
 And all men in their praying, self-deceived, address  
 The coinage of their own unquiet thoughts, unless  
 Thou in magnetic mercy to thyself divert  
 Our arrows, aimed unskilfully, beyond desert;  
 And all men are idolaters, crying unheard  
 To a deaf idol, if Thou take them at their word

## Chapter 4 - The journey continues

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*If we believe that tomorrow will be better,  
we can bear a hardship today*

*Thich Nhat Hahn, Vietnamese monk*

Each and every one of us has a spiritual path to travel, a story to tell, a unique life to live. We are all different. Dare to be different! The book you are holding in your hands right now forms part of your journey. My journey has become a part of your journey, whether you agree or disagree with what I have to say here. I cannot discuss the continuation of my journey without addressing questions raised in my previous two books. One of them was my assertion that I am not a believer anymore. Unfortunately such statements get taken in separation and out of context. I also said that my beliefs have turned into knowing. Believers do not know certain things; that is why they are believers. Mystics know! When you know, you no longer have to believe. Why? Because you know! My belief system is: **I do not have a belief system**. This is my belief system. Belief systems affect my health. I am also aware that belief systems enhance the health of some people. I think of faith as a journey to be undertaken and not as a set of propositions to be believed. I hope to offer some Christians a basis on which to continue to be Christians without having to confess any untrue or irrational beliefs. Some evangelicals protested that I was no longer a Christian when I jumped out of the evangelical “box” of a set of beliefs.

All of us have to walk in our specific spiritual paths for our own fulfilment. I have become a post-modern mystic and am becoming more of a mystic every passing day. The journey deeper into God gained momentum as from 17 August 2007. I therefore no longer seek to understand what is happening in my life. I simply surrender to the

evolution of my spirituality. I'm reminded of the words in Isaiah, "*they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strengths, they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not faint.*" This is the most important part of the journey for me. Just wait upon the Lord. Wait for God's right time. All things will be clear when the time is right. I always encourage my friends in the Emerging Church Conversation to not worry about the issues that are not cleared in their minds. Not to worry about unsolved question. Just live the questions for now, perhaps someday far in the future, we will gradually, without even noticing it, live our way into the answers to these mysterious and difficult questions. Life is a total mystery. To know that I am alive is itself a fact filled with wonder and mystery. It is this fact that enables me to write and ask very deep questions about life itself.

My spiritual journey has now evolved to a place where I conceive God as pure consciousness. God is no longer a person made in my image, a metaphysical thinking being "up there" or "out there". God is for me now a consciousness "in whom I live, move, and have my being" to use words attributed to Paul in Acts 17:28. In my understanding of God I have gone beyond words into a wordless wonder, awe, and mystery. The "old bearded man in the sky" was the first image to go, then the heavenly judge who kept record books, with angels watching as witnesses, and finally the literal father figure. The Father figure evaporated out of my consciousness just like the Father Christmas image of my childhood. When I began to unravel the theological tomes of the ages, the makeup of God was exposed to me. I grew up with the understanding of a God who was so much like a human being that we human beings were actually created in God's image. I now realize that it is the other way around. We have made God a person like us, in our image, then projected our image back to God to say that it is actually us who are made in his image, after we have first made him in our image. That is human ingenuity at its best! God is so utterly different from us and far, far, beyond anything we can imagine. We can't even imagine that He told some ancient biblical or other holy books scribes about him. Another human ingenuity is God telling a human being about God and a human being having a complete understanding of who God is. I now bet my faith on the possibility of a new insight emerging out of a new direction. I am now casting my Christian experience in non-theistic images. I have moved beyond a God who is other into a God who is all. I still experience bliss and transcendence now and then in my daily meditations. I experience

oneness with pure consciousness now and then. I experience the overwhelming “presence” now and then. I now know that when my material body perishes and I am buried my consciousness (the real me) will live in with God who is pure consciousness. I am an eternal being. I existed in God before the foundations of the world and will continue to live with God after my temporary human body perishes and becomes dust again. God has for me, become a word I use to seek to give expression to a concept beyond my experience and bound by neither time nor space. This consciousness that we traditionally call God is now rising all over the world hence the influx of “God books” by all religions and the New Age movement. We all will have to acknowledge the fact that all Bibles, creeds, doctrines, prayers, poems, and songs are just religious art created to allow us to speak of our God experience at an earlier point in our history. If we do not do this we end up worshipping idols as John Caputo says it so well in, *What would Jesus deconstruct*:

The postmodern God shatters our concepts of God – this is in line with a very ancient tradition of negative theology. Idolatry comes in many forms. Literalizing the truth of the Scriptures is idolatrous in a way that parallels the idolatry of the church in Catholicism...Orthodoxy is idolatry if it means holding the “correct opinions about God” – “fundamentalism” is the most extreme and salient example of such idolatry – but not if it means holding faith in the right way, that is, not holding it at all but being led by God, in love and service. Theology is idolatry if it means what we say about God instead of letting ourselves be addressed by what God has to say to us (iconic). Faith is idolatrous if it is rigidly self-certain but not if it is softened in the waters of “doubt.”

I am now convinced that I can abandon dying creeds and traditions without abandoning the living God. I have abandoned the tyranny of religious dogma. I seek to worship the postmodern God and not have to twist my brain to a pre-modern world to do this. I live my life in the nexus of technology and spirituality. As I evolve in scientific technology, I also need to evolve in spiritual technology. The God I worship cannot be threatened by scholarship or truth. A God who is capable of being killed or threatened by the explosion of knowledge is already too weak to command our allegiance or worship. I am engaged in this task that our postmodernism has named “deconstruction” because I am convinced that God, Jesus, the Bible, our historic creeds, and our traditional Christianity

being deconstructed are no longer credible to the postmodern mind. I write to those who have abandoned their household of faith to let them know that there is more to Christianity than they have imagined. I write to invite them to read the Bible again and meet Jesus again for the first time. The *Second Coming of Christ* is here. Just like in the first coming, Christ has been unfolding before our eyes quietly, unheralded, and unnoticed. “*You won’t be able to observe the coming of God’s imperial rule. People are not going to be able to say, ‘Look, here it is’ or ‘Over there!’ On the contrary, God’s imperial rule is right there in your presence.*” (Luke 18:25).

The journey of the title of this book started in the 1988. I then did not have the knowledge I know today. Ignorance is bliss! “*My people are killed by the lack of knowledge*”, says the biblical writer. That was the first time I visited the United States of America. That was also the year my first born daughter was born. A book cleverly entitled, *Eighty – eight (88) Reasons Why the Rapture Will Occur in 1988* had just been released. It was written by a NASA scientist by the name of Edgar Whisenant. He was a NASA rocket engineer. He had written a book in which he claimed that Jesus would soon return to earth and take his followers out of the world (the so called rapture), leading to the rise of the Antichrist and the coming of the end of the world ...He predicted that Jesus was literally and physically coming in September 1988. The very month my daughter was born. In a sense the prediction was correct as it gave us an angel that has been a source of joy in our lives. That is another story anyway. Going back to the NASA scientist; He made the prediction on the basis of many first century biblical sayings which were directed to the first century Church and the first century generation. I did not know that then. My mind was too naive, ignorant and gullible. I am not going to recount Whisenant’s eighty-eight reasons in this book, but I will only mention one. He used the familiar verse that has been used since the generation of Mathew (24:34). He twisted the scripture out of its original meaning and focus on the generation that it was pointing to and made it mean the generation of 1948, when Israel became a country again. How long is a generation in the Bible? Forty years. He then added forty years to the year 1948 and came to 1988. He was then convinced on the basis of this prophecy – and eighty-seven others – that the end of the world as we know it was going to come in September 1988. When other Christians who were biblical literalists pointed out that Jesus himself had said that “no one knows the day or the hour” when the end would come, Whisenant was not at all fazed. He did not know “the day or the hour,” he

said; he just knew the week, which was the week of September 11<sup>th</sup> week (Rosh Hashanah). Needless to say that Jesus never came in 1988.

Hal Lindsey's bestseller *The Late, Great Planet Earth*, also predicted that the rapture would take place in 1988. There were actually more than ten doomsday prophets who wrote books that confirmed Jesus was coming in 1988. All of them used the reasoning that it was 40 years (one Biblical generation) after Israel had become a nation. Colin Deal wrote a book entitled *Christ returns by 1988: 101 Reasons Why*. Well, Jesus never came in 1988. He did not come in 1989 also; that was after Whisenant claimed that He had failed to remember that there was no year "zero" in our calendar. He had released another book: *The Final Shout: Rapture Report 1989*. He claimed that his calculations were off by a year. Jesus was going to return in 1989. I never bothered about 1989 because I had entered my spiritual wilderness already. I continued to walk with Jesus (unaware) through my spiritual wilderness. That wilderness lasted until 17 August 2007 as I indicated in my previous book. Like all of us, false prophets before and after him, Whisenant disappeared from the second coming radar without apologizing to us who were betrayed. This book is therefore a deconstruction of a two-thousand year old belief or delusion in the literal return of Jesus Christ. I am writing to demythologize The Second Coming of Christ. I do not want you, dear reader, to travel the road I have travelled. It can be very traumatic. In hindsight, and in the spirit of the relativity of all articulated truth, I can declare today that Jesus did come on 21 September 1988. On that day my first born daughter was born. Looking at our own first born child became an experience of mystery and of wonder at something greater than us. This was a angel that came out me and my wife. I spent most of my life holding this angel as it was evolving in my arms. I sat in wonder of this miracle of miracles. I held her on my arms and thought about the awe, mystery and wonder of this thing we call life. I then made a vow to myself – that vow has now led to the book you are reading. **I vowed never to be lied to by a preacher again.** That was before the advent of the internet. Now I web search every sermon I hear. I discover that a sermon that is delivered is one worldview in a supermarket of worldviews. The content of this book is a worldview in a supermarket of worldviews on the second coming of Christ. There is absolutely no absolute and objective truth out there. All truth is totally subjective. If I affirm that there is absolute truth, I also have to affirm that I am the one

who preaches it. This is the reason why evangelicals hate the new postmodern spirituality so much.

### Who is the real Jesus Christ?

*I am not a believer, but I have the utmost respect for Jesus Christ. I believe He was the most influential person who ever lived* – Larry King, CNN journalist

“If Jesus had never lived, we would not have been able to invent him”, said Professor Walter Wink. In my previous book I mentioned the raging Jesus wars that have become a hot potato of all time. These are the Jesus’ I listed: *The Da Vinci Code* Jesus; the *Gnostic* Jesus, the *Jesus Seminar* Jesus; the *Orthodox Catholic* Jesus; the *African Zionist* Jesus; the *Conservative Evangelical* Jesus; the *Liberal Protestant* Jesus, the *Eschatological* Jesus; the *Third* Jesus; the *New Age Movement* Jesus etc. Who is the real Jesus? In his book, *The New Kind of Christianity*, Brian McLaren has added to the list:

...we may unintentionally protect and uphold the white supremacist Jesus, the colonial Jesus, the Eurocentric Jesus, the Republican or Democrat Jesus, the capitalist or communist Jesus, the slave-owning Jesus, the nuclear bomb-dropping America – first Jesus, the organ-music stained glass nostalgic-sentimental Jesus, the anti-science know-nothing simpleton Jesus, the prosperity-gospel get-rich quick Jesus, the institutional white-shirt and tie Jesus, the Native American-slaying genocide Jesus, the cuddly omnipotent Jesus, the male-chauvinist Jesus, the homophobic “God hates-fags” Jesus, the South African pro-apartheid Jesus, the Joe Six-Pack Jesus, the anti-Semitic Nazi Jesus, the anti-Muslim Crusader Jesus, and so on. Those who think they stand had better take heed lest they fall, and those who think they know may have more learning to do.

No reputable scholar worth his or her salt doubts the fact that Jesus Christ of Nazareth was a fact of history. Even historical books outside of the Bible confirm his historicity. Jesus mixed with prostitutes, lepers, tax-collectors and sinners. He was a revolutionary who troubled the existing powers that be. He identified himself with common people and ate with them. He was called a carpenter and a son of a carpenter, a very menial and low paying job. He was seen by people and his followers as one who

brought heavenly values to earth. People saw God in him. The belief that Jesus was God, and all related beliefs, developed after his death and were put into the writings of the Gospels thirty five to seventy years after Jesus died. It was only in the year 95 - 100 CE that the writer of John coined the words that “God became man and dwelt amongst us”. John spoke about a Jesus who was God. Quoted him saying all the “**I am**” sayings found in the book of John. He was quoted saying, “*I am the true vine, I am the gate, I am the good shepherd, Before Abraham ever was, I am, I am the light of the world, I am the bread of life, I am the resurrection and the life*”, etc. These statements have been a subject of controversy since they came into written form and have been debated for the past 1900 years up to the writing of this book.

Most scholars agree that the historical Jesus never said anything written in the book of John. This is how the early church thought about Jesus by the time the Gospel of John came into written form, from 95 CE; this is more than 70 years after the death of Jesus. The “**I AM**” sayings speak of the power of the Jesus event as it touched on the lives of his disciples. They also speak of the ancient name of Divinity as the “**I am**”. More than 2000 years after Jesus was born we are still debating on who actually this greatest figure of history was actually. Today most Christians, if asked to write their own thoughts about Jesus, would be surprised to find that, judged by the official doctrines and creeds of the church, they are actually heretics. Pastors who try to shield their churches from heretical teachings should actually try this exercise; they will then discover how many heretics they have in their churches. When people ask me if Jesus is the Son of God, I respond by saying, “Yes, and He is the Lamb of God as well, and the Bread of life, and the Light of the world, and-and-and-...” I am no longer a biblical literalist. I then ask, “Is God a human being, to be talked of having a Son?” I thank Professor John Dominic Crossan for this wonderful insight.

What is the “true” Christology of Jesus, If ever there is anything like this? Who was Jesus? Who is Jesus today? Which Jesus is important to you? The one in your heart or the fuzzy historical Jesus? What is the truth behind the two thousand year old belief in his second coming? Was it meant to be a literal second coming? How did the whole belief system begin? Is the truth of this belief system literal or spiritual, or even both? Can this Jesus be boxed and entombed into our traditional definitions? Has evangelicalism owned and domesticated Jesus for too long? Has Jesus jumped out of the ‘evangelical box’ and ran for freedom? The Jesus

wars have reached proportions of unprecedented theological stress. All Christian bookshops, especially evangelical ones, are filled with books like, “*Who is the real Jesus*”, “*The case for the real Christ*”, “*The Historical Jesus*”, and many such books intended to refute the developing post-modern understanding of Jesus. This is one of many books on the post-modern understanding of Jesus. The New Age movement have their own books like; *The Third Jesus* and, *Jesus* – by Deepak Chopra and *The Mystical Life of Jesus* by Sylvia Browne. I am more drawn to the Jesus presented by the New Age movement. I am more drawn to *The Third Jesus* of Deepak Chopra and the Jesus presented by Eckhart Tolle’s *New Earth* books. He is the Jesus beyond my religious boundaries. He is the Jesus of enlightenment; the Jesus who is the light of the world. I found the Jesus presented in Deepak Chopra’s book, *Jesus: A Story of Enlightenment*, restoring my faith in my own faith tradition. The book is actually a fictional story of Jesus but is more credible than the Jesus story presented in the Gospels. I thought that all that could be said about Jesus had been said in the Bible. The purpose of this book is to deconstruct, demythologize, and re-mythologize *The Second Coming of Christ* for our post-modern generation. Recent developments around the person of Jesus Christ and the latest scholarly research, including the discovery of ancient documents like the Nag Hamandi and Dead Sea scrolls, should convince us that Jesus is always beyond what we human beings can conceive.

### **Mythical Christianity**

During World War II a leading New Testament scholar, Professor Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1976), wrote that, “*The Christian message had become incredible to modern humankind because it pre-supposed a mythical world which now belongs to past history.*”. He asked what possible meaning could be given to such phrases of the creed as “*descended into hell*” and “*ascended into heaven*”, when “*there is no longer any heaven or hell in the traditional sense of the words.* He argues that it was a matter not of eliminating these terms and concepts but of interpreting them. Bultmann proposed a programme of “*demythologising*”, a word he coined to refer to the task of re-interpreting the essential message of Christianity into thoughtful forms appropriate to the world in which we live – that is the global world. He described in detail the New Testament “*mythology*” that in his estimation needs to be eliminated. I have decided to enlist only twenty (20) items, from the

many, that Bultmann suggested that they needed to be interpreted in order for the essential message of Christianity to be understood by the post-modern man:

1. The Pre-existence of Jesus Christ
2. The literal virgin birth of Jesus Christ
3. The literal deity of Jesus Christ
4. The doctrine that says Jesus Christ died for our sins
5. The substitution death of Jesus Christ through his blood
6. The literal resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead
7. The literal ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven
8. The literal return of Jesus Christ in glory
9. The final judgement of the world
10. The literal existence of spirits, good or evil
11. The personality and power of the Holy Spirit
12. The doctrine of the Trinity
13. The doctrine of the Son of God
14. The doctrine of God the Father
15. Death as a consequence of sin
16. The doctrine of *the Original Sin*
17. The fall of man from perfection to sin
18. The teaching on good angels and evil demons
19. The reign of a literal Satan on earth and the very existence of such a deity
20. The three-storied world of heaven above, earth on the ground floor, and hell underground

This is quite a formidable list! This list is what is traditionally called the “foundations of classical Christianity”. These are the core tenets of Christianity and many will rightfully question how Christianity could have a future without them. These myths have formed the essence of Christianity as we have known it over the past two thousand years. Christianity has indeed been sustained and immensely satisfied by these myths for the past two thousand years. Many Christians have suggested that there could never be effective gospel preaching (kerugma) without these myths. I beg to disagree as the preaching of

the gospel has been continuing despite these myths. Postmodern theology demands the de-construction and the re-mythologizing of these myths. Removing these “foundations” will amount to the total destruction of Christianity, some may say. Those who have identified their Christian faith with a literal reading of the Gospels will inevitably question whether one can continue to be a Christian without being a biblical literalist. I think the relevant question should be, “Can Christianity survive; over the next two millennia, with this kind of literal language?” Granted, this has been Christianity’s language for the past two thousand years without knowing that it was borrowed from Old Testament events, some of it literally.

This list does challenge the orthodoxy of our contemporary religious consensus. It takes one completely out of the traditional religious boundary or box. To some, this may amount to a total destruction of Christianity as we understand it. If these claims are suspect or did not really happen, then Christianity is suspect at best; and perhaps fraudulent at worst. The choice is now; a Jesus shrouded in mythology or no Jesus at all. Christianity has to be re-examined and deconstructed or else we all slide into atheism and agnosticism. Professor Bultmann suggested that these were myths that should be demythologized and reinterpreted through a new modern mythology for our new modern scientific generation. That generation has now become a postmodern generation. After my spiritual encounter of August 2007 I got introduced to my new great spiritual and intellectual mentor, Bishop John Shelby Spong. I am not ashamed to call Bishop John Spong the “Early Church Father” of postmodern Christianity.

Bishop Spong has described this mythology as Jewish *Midrash* (Wikipedia defines *Midrash as; a way of interpreting biblical stories that goes beyond simple distillation of religious, legal or moral teachings. It fills in many gaps left in the biblical narrative regarding events and personalities that are only hinted at. The term also refers to the whole compilation of homiletic teachings on the Bible*). Bishop John Spong, who has written a series of very fine books over his more than sixty years of spiritual journeying, has in his insightful book *Liberating the Gospels*, explained in detail the overwhelming influence of the Hebrew Scriptures on the creation of the New Testament accounts and events. Bishop Spong’s premise, which he bases on the work of the late eminent Bible scholar Professor Michael

Goulder (1927-2010), is that most of what is written in the Gospels involves references to the various festivals following the Jewish liturgical calendar. Professor Michael Goulder passed away on 06 January 2010, while I was already busy with this book, he was 82 years old. Bishop Spong, who was mentored by Professor Goulder, fills page after page with comparisons of texts in the Old Testament reflected and (sometimes literally) retold in the New Testament. Besides an analysis of the Gospels themselves, Bishop Spong also takes certain themes or figures from the Gospels to offer a closer look at the use of the *midrashic* principle in these stories. He points out that;

... The Gospels are Jewish attempts to interpret in a Jewish way the life of a Jewish man in whom the transcendence of God was believed to have been experienced in a fresh and powerful encounter. These interpretations were not exact descriptions of what happened historically or what Jesus said or did. Stories about heroes of the Jewish past were heightened and retold again and again about heroes of the present moment, not because those same events actually occurred, but because the reality of God revealed in those moments was like the reality of God known in the past. As this journey through the Gospels progresses, we will watch this *midrashic* principle operating time after time.

Bishop Spong and the Jesus Seminar Professors have shown us how the Jewish liturgical calendar organized both the worship and the daily life of Jesus and the first century Christians. This calendar influenced the writing of the gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. They have taken us through the fascinating journey through the Gospels, in which each text, including this list from Professor Bultmann, was examined from a Jewish perspective. We then discover that Mark, in his gospel, describes the story of Jesus related to the Jewish festivals from Rosh Hashanah (New Year) through Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) to Passover, about half of the year. This is the reason why Mark's gospel is half of Mathew's gospel. When Mathew wrote in the ninth decade He copied from Mark and made the description of the Jewish festivals to extend for the whole Jewish calendar, thus making Mathew's gospel twice as large as Mark. The Gospel of Luke then becomes the story of Jesus told against the order of the Torah. We discover Torah readings of Genesis and other books in the birth stories

of the Gospels: In Zechariah and Elisabeth, the parents of John the Baptist, we find echoes of Abraham and Sarah; both sets of parents were called righteous (Genesis 26:5, Luke 1:6). Both Sarah and Elisabeth were barren (Genesis 11:30, Luke 1:7). Both were advanced in age (Genesis 18:11, Luke 1:1). Both fathers were assured nothing was impossible with God (Genesis 18:14, Luke 1:37). The theme of Moses' parting of the waters of the Red Sea was repeated in Joshua's crossing of the Jordan (Joshua 3), then later in Elijah and Elisha's crossing of the same river (2 Kings 2). Both of the latter were *midrashic* retellings at later times of the prototype Exodus incident.

Then in the Gospels, when Jesus is baptized at the Jordan, Mark makes him part not the waters of the river, but the firmament separating heaven from earth, allowing the passage of God's voice and the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. This was a Jewish way of suggesting that the holy God encountered in Jesus went even beyond the God presence that had been met in Moses, Joshua, Elijah and Elisha. That is the way the midrashic principle worked; stories about heroes of the Jewish past were heightened and retold again and again about heroes of the present moment, not because those same events actually occurred, but because the reality of God revealed in those moments was like the reality of God known in the past.

Other more obvious examples (among the hundreds we encounter in Spong's book) would be Herod's attempt to kill the Christ child through his "slaughter of the innocents", a retelling of Pharaoh's attempt to kill the promised deliverer Moses by slaying the Hebrew first-born in Egypt; or the entry of Jesus, riding a donkey, into Jerusalem on "Palm Sunday", a rendering of the prophet's visionary scene of the Day of the Lord in Zechariah 9:9-11: "*Rejoice, daughter of Zion ... for see, your king is coming to you ... humble and mounted on an ass ...*" Neither event do modern scholars believe actually happened in the life of Jesus. Actually, all post-modern scholars believe that most of the Bible is myth or inferred using Jewish *midrashic* techniques to tell the story of Jesus. Joseph, the purported Father of Jesus never existed as a literal person. Judas Iscariot never existed. No camels, stars, angels, dreams, etc as portrayed in Jesus' birth narratives. Most of the book of Acts is a fabrication by Luke. Some of the epistles attributed to Apostle Paul were not written by him. The list is endless. Next, we Christians have piled onto this combination our own additional fantasies, myths, legends, and the

creative imagination of the past two thousand years. It has not become impossible, in my opinion, to fully understand the New Testament without a profound knowledge of its Jewish past. Most of the biblical narratives of the New Testament are not remembered biographical details as our past Christian tradition has asserted. They are rather the rich *midrashic* weaving and reweaving of the sacred moments of the Jewish past around the life of Jesus of Nazareth in whom the original Christian community, which was composed predominantly of Jewish people, had come to believe that God was at work. The purpose was to open Jewish scriptures so that Jesus could be seen as the fulfilment of the law and the prophets. All utterances were to fulfil the promise of the coming of Christ “according to the scriptures”. As Bishop Spong says:

What is important is to discover the experience that caused people to assert, that in some way that was beyond their ability to doubt, they believed that they met the holy God in and through the life of Jesus of Nazareth. They were convinced that this “God presence” was quite frankly beyond the capacity of human beings to create.

It is the experience of the God presence that is important, not the explanation of the God presence. We, western, non-Jewish, gentile Christians literalized the explanations because we did not know how to appreciate Jewish books written in a Jewish style and employing Jewish methods like the *midrashic* principle. The Old Testament is an ancient Jewish story of God and the New Testament is a story of God by the early Church that was mostly composed of Jewish followers until the ninth decade. The gospels of John, Luke as well as the book of Acts were written in the ninth and tenth decade of the Church to address mainly the gentiles.

## **New Testament mythology**

All the symbols and language were all inferred from the Old Testament Jewish way of living. They are a re-telling of Old Testament events. Modern scholars have been trying to recast for a contemporary audience the most ancient symbols through which the meaning of the post-Easter Jesus had been articulated and understood before the onset of creeds. Since the first Christians were all Jews, it was inevitable that their original interpretive symbols would grow out

of the worship life and history of the Jewish people. These first generation Christians looked at Jesus through Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, when the sacrificial lamb was offered for the sins of the people. They also understood Jesus as the Paschal Lamb of the Passover celebration, slain to spare Jewish homes from a visit by the angel of death. The Jewish families celebrated their redemption and freedom by re-enacting annually these two sacrifices: the lamb of Yom Kippur and the lamb of Passover. In time these two images created a lens through which they began to look at Jesus. The death of Jesus thus came to be seen as analogous to the deaths of these two sacrificed lambs, the one creating atonement and the other breaking the power of death. That was why Jesus began to be called "The Lamb of God." This imagery dominated that book we call the Epistle to the Hebrews. The popular evangelical phrase, "Jesus died for my sins," also arose directly out of these original interpretations of the cross. Other early Jewish images appeared in Christian history and were incorporated into the church's growing understanding of Jesus. There was the "servant of the Lord" image, drawn from II Isaiah; the "shepherd king" image, drawn from II Zechariah; and the "Son of Man" image, drawn from the writings of Daniel.

I also learned that "*haggadic midrash*" meant that these were Jewish stories once told about other people in the Hebrew Scriptures now being retold about Jesus of Nazareth. The story of the wise men, for example, was a play on Isaiah 60. The manger in Luke comes out of Isaiah 1. The swaddling clothes were borrowed from the Wisdom of Solomon. The story of Zechariah and Elizabeth having John the Baptist in their old age was the Abraham and Sarah story being recycled. On and on the insights exploded in my brain like 200-watt light bulbs popping. Bishop Spong led me to see that the Jesus of history had been so thoroughly wrapped inside the Jewish scriptures that one could never really understand the gospels until one began to read them through Jewish eyes. He suggested that these gospels had been preached before they had been written and they reflected the presence of synagogue life at the centre of the Christian movement during the first forty or more years of Christian history. The startling realization finally emerged that Mark, the first gospel to be written, and both Matthew and Luke, which were based on Mark, were all basically liturgical documents designed to portray Jesus as the fulfilment of Jewish Scripture and expectations. It was the liturgical life of the synagogue, not remembered history, which organized the

Christian gospel writing tradition, which means that we misread the Jesus story completely when we pretend that these stories are literal. Bishop Spong's amazing insight had literally given me a new doorway into the gospels. I began to follow this lead into a deeper and deeper understanding of the origins of the Christian story.

The same goes for Enoch's literal ascension to heaven contrasted with Jesus ascending to heaven also, both heavens were thought to be above the skies then. The Virgin Birth, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Blood Sacrifice, Penal Substitution, Jesus dying for our sins, The Fall into sin, being washed in the blood, etc all have their Old Testament counterparts' overwhelming influence on the creation of the New Testament accounts and events. There are just too many examples to mention in one chapter. It is true that there was a historical person called Jesus Christ who lived in the Middle East. He manifested the presence of God in his life and was killed by the Roman soldiers (not Jews as we've been told previously). It was only 30 – 70 years after Jesus' death (90 years after his birth) that stories about Jesus were in written form. The memory of Jesus was kept alive through the principle of using *midrashic* sermons in their liturgy. Scholars tell us that none of the units of the story which made up this liturgy describe actual historical events but are, in all their aspects, midrashic creations, that is, a recasting of ancient biblical precedents in a story not meant to be taken literally. They were not literal or historical facts but were powerful liturgies for mediating the presence of God. I highly recommend Bishop John Spong's book, *Liberating the Gospels: Reading the Bible with Jewish Eyes - - Freeing Jesus from 2000 Years of Misunderstanding*. This has to be Bishop Spong's finest book ever. In it He offers a compelling view of the Gospels as thoroughly Jewish texts. He powerfully argues that many of the Gospel accounts of events in the life of Jesus – from the stories of birth to his physical resurrection – are not literally true. He therefore suggests that, for many, especially in our new postmodern cosmology, the accounts in the Gospels should not be taken literally. For some believers, like the believer who once said, “*My mind is made up. I do not want to be confused by facts*”, this may be too devastating. No wonder I advise; **Do not believe what I believe!**

## **New Testament contradictions**

There are too many inconsistencies, incompatibilities, and contradictions to accept the story of Jesus told in the Gospels as historical fact. Many of the contradictions in the Gospels are mutually exclusive: that is, if something happened as one of the Gospels says it did, it could not have happened the way another Gospel tells it. As much as we accept that eyewitness stories to an accident will differ when eventually related; the difference cannot be that one eyewitness says the accident happened in Cape Town between two cars, and another says the same accident was actually in Durban and it involved two trains. This is what we read in the Gospels, when we read them critically as opposed to reading them devotionally. How could Jesus be born in Nazareth and Bethlehem (taking geography into account)? Was John the Baptist the new Elijah as claimed by Mathew and Mark (Matt 14:1-12, Mark 9:13,) or was Jesus the new Elijah as claimed by Luke and John (Luke 1:17, John 1:21). John says Jesus was crucified before the Passover (19:14 – 16) and Mark says it was after the Passover (14:12). How could witnesses say an event happened in two conflicting, very important periods? How could the literal resurrection happen in Galilee and Jerusalem at the same time, as the Gospels claim? Was it literal or spiritual? Paul says He was the last to see the risen Jesus (1 Cor. 15:1-8). Paul was converted long after the Easter experience. Was his seeing actual sight or insight? The accounts of Jesus' life are also full of things that are impossible for the 21<sup>st</sup> century discriminating mind to accept. Let me use another example, the resurrection myth, the book of Mathew 27:52 tells of the “saints in Jerusalem”, whose graves were opened by Jesus' death and their bodies which were long deceased were seen by many. Was this literal seeing? This is supposed to have occurred while Jesus was on the cross. In the next chapter we are told about the resurrection of Jesus. The question is; which of the two resurrection stories is fact or myth? Some evangelical scholars dismiss the first episode as myth and the one relating to Jesus as fact. Let us accept their explanation, but, does this take away the inherent contradictions? Let us probe further. Was this resurrected Christ naked? The Bible tells us, they (Roman soldiers), took his clothes and divided them amongst themselves (Jn.19:23; Matt 27:35). As I have already indicated; I do not only study the Bible devotionally – I also study it critically. I search for truth. I will later explain, rather than deny, the mutually exclusive

contradictions in the Bible. Here are just a few (in a very long list) mutually exclusive contradictions in the New Testament (when read them as literal events):

The announcement of the special birth came before conception.	Lk.1:26-31.
The announcement of the special birth came after conception.	Mt.1:18-21.
Jesus' parents were told of their son's future greatness.	Mt.1:18-21; Lk.1:28-35.
Jesus' parents knew nothing of their son's potential.	Lk.2:48-50.
The angel told Joseph.	Mt.1:20.
The angel told Mary.	Lk.1:28.
Jacob was Joseph's father.	Mt.1:16.
Heli was Joseph's father.	Lk.3:23.
Jesus was tempted during the 40 days in the wilderness.	Mk.1:13.
Jesus was tempted after the 40 days in the wilderness.	Mt.4:2-3.
The devil first took Jesus to the pinnacle, then to the mountain top.	Mt.4:5-8.
The devil first took Jesus to the mountain top, then to the pinnacle.	Lk.4:5-9.
Jesus begins his ministry after John's arrest.	Mk.1:13-14.
Jesus begins his ministry before John's arrest.	Jn.3:22-24.
Jesus cured Simon Peter's mother-in-law after he cleansed the leper.	Mt.8:1-15.
Jesus cured Simon Peter's mother-in-law before he cleansed the leper.	Mk.1:30-42; Lk.4:38, 5:13.
James and John were with Jesus when he healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law.	Mk.1:29-31.
James and John were not with Jesus when he healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law.	Lu.4:38-39; 5:10-11.
The people were not impressed with the feeding of the multitude.	Mk.6:52.
The people were very impressed with the feeding of the multitude.	Jn.6:14.
After the feeding of the multitude, Jesus went to Gennesaret.	Mk.6:53.
After the feeding of the multitude, Jesus went to Capernaum.	Jn.6:14-17.

Jesus cursed the fig tree so that it would not bear fruit.	Mk.11:14; Mt.21:19.
It wasn't time for the fig tree to bear fruit.	Mk.11:13.
The "Lord's Prayer" was taught to many during the "Sermon on the Mount".	Mt.6:9.
The "Lord's Prayer" was taught only to the disciples at another time.	Lu.11:1.
Jesus had his own house.	Mk.2:15.
Jesus did not have his own house.	Lu.9:58.
Divorce, except for unfaithfulness, is wrong.	Mt.5:32.
Divorce for any reason is wrong.	Mk.10:11-12.
Do not take sandals (shoes) or staves.	Mt.10:10.
Take only sandals (shoes) and staves.	Mk.6:8-9.
Jesus said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees."	Lk.12:1.
Jesus said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."	Mt.16:6-11.
Jesus said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod."	Mk.8:15.
Jesus heals two unnamed blind men.	Mt.20:29-30.
Jesus heals one named blind man.	Mk.10:46-52.
The cock crowed once.	Mt.26:74.
The cock crowed twice.	Mk.14:72.
Peter makes his first denial to a maid and some others.	Mt.26:69-70.
It was only to the maid.	Mk.14:66-68; Lk.22:56-57; Jn.18:17.
Peter's second denial was to another maid.	Mt.26:71-72.
It was to the same maid.	Mk.14:69-70.
It was to a man and not a maid.	Lk.22:58.
Jesus is given a scarlet robe.	Mt.27:28.
Jesus is given a purple robe.	Mk.15:17; Jn.19:2.
Jesus is given a gorgeous robe.	Lk.23:11.
Peter's third denial was to several bystanders.	Mt.26:73-74; Mk.14:69-70.
It was to one person.	Lk.22:59-60.
It was to a servant.	Jn.18:26-27.

The chief priests bought the field.	Mt.27:6-7.
Judas bought the field.	Acts 1:16-19.
Judas threw down the money and left.	Mt.27:5.
Judas used the coins to buy the field.	Acts1:18.
Judas hanged himself.	Mt.27:5.
Judas fell headlong and burst his head open.	Acts1:18.
The centurion says, "Truly this was the son of God."	Mt.27:54.
The centurion says, "Truly this man was the son of God."	Mk.15:39.
The centurion says, "Certainly, this was a righteous man."	Lk.23:47.
There was no centurion.	Jn.19:31-37.
Upon their arrival, the stone was still in place.	Mt.28:1 2.
Upon their arrival, the stone had been removed.	Mk.16:4; Lk.24:2; Jn.20:1.
There was an earthquake.	Mt.28:2.
There was no earthquake.	Mk.16:5; Lk.24:2-4; Jn.20:12
The visitors ran to tell the disciples.	Mt.28:8.
The visitors told the eleven and all the rest.	Lk.24:9.
The visitors said nothing to anyone.	Mk.16:8.
Jesus first resurrection appearance was right at the tomb.	Jn.20:12-14.
Jesus first resurrection appearance was fairly near the tomb.	Mt.28:8-9.
Jesus first resurrection appearance was on the road to Emmaus.	Lk.24:13-16.
One doubted.	Jn.20:24.
Some doubted.	Mt.28:17.
All doubted.	Mk.16:11; Lk.24:11-14.
Jesus said that his blood was shed for many.	Mk.14:24.
Jesus said his blood was shed for his disciples.	Lu.22:20.
Simon of Cyrene was forced to bear the cross of Jesus.	Mt.27:32; Mk.15:21; Lu.23:26.
Jesus bore his own cross.	Jn.19:16-17.
Jesus was offered vinegar and gall to drink.	Mt.27:34.
Jesus was offered vinegar to drink.	Jn.19:29-30.
Jesus was offered wine and myrrh to drink.	Mk.15:23.

Jesus refused the drink offered him.	Mk.15:23.
Jesus tasted the drink offered and then refused.	Mt.27:34.
Jesus accepted the drink offered him.	Jn.19:30.
Nicodemus prepared the body with spices.	Jn.19:39-40.
Failing to notice this, the women bought spices to prepare the body later.	Mk. 16:1; Lu.23:55-56.
The body was anointed.	Jn.19:39-40.
The body was not anointed.	Mk.15:46 to 16:1; Lk.23:55 to 24:1.
The women bought materials before the Sabbath.	Lu.23:56.
The women bought materials after the Sabbath.	Mk.16:1.
Jesus was first seen by Cephas, then the twelve.	1 Cor.15:5.
Jesus was first seen by the two Marys.	Mt.28:1, 8-9.
Jesus was first seen by Mary Magdalene.	Mk.16:9; Jn.20:1, 14-15.
Jesus was first seen by Cleopas and others.	Lu.24:17-18.
Jesus was first seen by the disciples.	Acts 10:40-41.
The two Marys went to the tomb.	Mt.28:1.
The two Marys and Salome went to the tomb.	Mk.16:1.
Several women went to the tomb.	Lu.24:10.
Only Mary Magdalene went to the tomb.	Jn.20:1.
An angel sat on the stone at the door of the tomb.	Mt.28:2.
A man was sitting inside the tomb.	Mk.16:5.
Two men were standing inside the tomb.	Lk.24:3-4.
Two angels were sitting inside the tomb.	Jn.20:12.
Peter did not go into the tomb but stooped and looked inside.	Lk.24:12.
Peter did go into the tomb, and another disciple stooped and looked inside.	Jn.20:3-6.
After the resurrection, the disciples held Jesus by the feet.	Mt.28:9.
After the resurrection, Jesus told Thomas to touch his side.	John 20:27.
After the resurrection, Jesus said that he was not to be touched.	Jn.20:17.
The disciples were frightened when they saw Jesus.	Lk.24:36-37.
The disciples were glad when they first saw Jesus.	Jn.20:20.
Twelve disciples saw Jesus.	1 Cor.15:5.
Eleven disciples saw Jesus. Thomas was not there.	Mt.28:16-17; Jn.20:19-25.

Jesus ascended on the third day after the resurrection.	Lk.24:21, 50-51.
Jesus ascended the same day as the crucifixion.	Lk.23:42-43.
Jesus ascended forty days after the resurrection.	Acts1:3-9.
At the time of the ascension, there were about 120 brethren.	Acts1:15.
At the time of the ascension, there were about 500 brethren.	1 Cor.15:6.
The ascension took place while the disciples were seated together at a table.	Mk.16:14-19.
The ascension took place outdoors at Bethany.	Lk.24:50-51.
The ascension took place outdoors at Mt. Olivet.	Acts1:9-12.
The Moneychangers incident occurred at the end of Jesus' career.	Mt.21:11-12.
The Moneychangers incident occurred at the beginning of Jesus' career.	Jn.2:11-15.
Zacharias was the son of Jehoida, the priest.	2 Chr. 24:20.
Jesus said that Zacharias was the son of Barachias. <i>(Note: The name Barachias or Barachiah does not appear in the Old Testament)</i>	Mt.23:35.
The coming of the kingdom will be accompanied by signs and miracles.	Mt.24:29-33; Mk.13:24-29.
It will not be accompanied by signs and miracles since it occurs from within.	Lk.17:20-21.
Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is an unforgivable sin.	Mk.3:29.
All sins are forgivable.	Acts 13:39; Col.2:13; 1 Jn.1:9.
The Holy Spirit was with John from before he was born.	Lk.1:15-41.
The Holy Spirit was with Elizabeth before John's birth.	Lk.1:41.
The Holy Spirit was with Zechariah.	Lk.1:67.
The Holy Spirit was with Simeon.	Lk.2:25.
Jesus is the Son of God.	Jn.6:69; Jn.20:31.
Jesus is the Son of Man.	Mt.18:11; Lk.21:27.

The above-mentioned mutually exclusive contradictions should be proof enough that the Bible was not meant to be read as a literal book depicting factual history. Jews know this very well. Most of these Gospel utterances were actually, sermons and plays that were

delivered in synagogues for thirty five to seventy years after the death of Jesus. These were plays that Jewish Christians were re-enacting as they remembered Jesus Christ for thirty five to seventy years after his death. The Gospels came into written form after this period. Artists will always bring their art, independent thinking and genius into any play. Mel Gibson has done this very well in the movie *The Passion of the Christ*. We can do our own plays and use our art, imagination, and genius thinking to tell the story of Jesus in our own way. This is not deception, it is called art. *Liberating the Gospels* is filled with examples and demonstrations of the overwhelming influence of the Hebrew Scriptures on the creation of the New Testament accounts and events. Bishop Spong has concluded that a literal view of the Gospels has become untenable. A myth is a story with 'deep explanatory or symbolic significance', and ***Christian myth*** is therefore a story that explains or symbolises Christian beliefs. Myth is very important for the mediation of meaning this side of the universe. Worship songs and choruses about Jesus are a part of mediating meaning. They should not be interpreted as literal events.

In Bultmann's interpretation there is no objectively existing God or Jesus Christ or Virgin Mary, or any saint to whom the believer might effectively pray, for that whole objective world has been deleted as mythological imagery. Bultmann always insisted on the protection of mythical truths. In academic and theological studies describing a story as myth does not imply falsehood. It may actually point to deeper truths of life, truths that are deeper than literal truths. When I say God is a mythical figure and not a literal one I may be pointing to this fact. We use the story of mythical Humpty Dumpty to illustrate the fact that in life there are some things that once done are irrevocable. Religion, because it seeks to provide human security, always seems to have a need for certainty and to literalize a supposedly inerrant source. Another factor is that so many adults have never moved beyond their childhood religious fantasies, so that they do not know how to cope with hard human realities; hence they seek comfort in the simplicity of yesterday, in the protective arms of a heavenly parent.

*When I was a child, I talked like a child, I reasoned like a child; now that I have become a man, I am done with childish ways and have put them aside. 1 Cor. 13:11 (Amplified)*

It is no longer a secret that Christianity and the person of Jesus Christ have a lot of pagan roots in them. All pagan gods were said to; have been born of a literal virgin, literally resurrected from the dead, literally ascended into heaven, and all the other related myths that are not the brief of this book. This has led to many non-Christian theologians to assert that Jesus Christ never existed historically; he is just a figment of first century fabrication. One of them J.M. Robertson, in his book, *Pagan Christ(s)*, says,

...now about Jesus the man, did he exist? I think not. All the teaching of Jesus can be attributed to other sources and grafted over the Gospel myth. Nothing he said was substantially different in any way from previous sayings. Jesus was not a man but a contrived myth. The Christian myth grew by absorbing details from pagan cults. The birth story is similar to many nativity myths in the pagan world. The Christ had to have a virgin for a mother. Like the image of the child-god in the cult of Dionysus, he was pictured in swaddling clothes in a basket manger. He was born in a stable like Horus--the stable temple of the virgin goddess, Isis, Queen of Heaven. Again, like Dionysus, he turned water into wine, like Aesculapius, he raised men from the dead and gave sight to the blind; and like Attis and Adonis, he is mourned and rejoiced over by women. His resurrection took place, like that of Mithra, from a rock tomb.

The man Jesus did not exist. There are, however sources that speak of others seeing him. These were second hand sources. No direct observations were made. At one time or another we have all had a vision of Deity in our minds. Such is the sight of Jesus, a mental image...What of the Gospels then? They are passion plays designed to be read or acted out in front of an audience. Passion plays were a common feature of pagan religion. Looking at the Gospels themselves one finds a chop written, scene by scene, display of the life of the God man. Only the important aspects of his life are described. The minor events and influences of the life of Jesus are not recorded, which leaves one to think that the Gospels are indeed a play.

Appendix B gives a description of why Jews do not believe in Jesus. I hear these reasons all the time as we engage in discussions about Jesus

with Jewish scholars. I reject the Jesus who is rejected by Jews. This is what happens when the truth of Christ is enshrouded with pagan myths like literal virgin births, literal resurrections, literal ascensions, etc. I do not have the time and space to go through all the additional elements that most post-modern scholars have dismissed as mythical, non-literal or *midrashic* in the New Testament. Most scholars now agree that there was a figure of history named Jesus Christ. He was killed by Romans through crucifixion (not the only figure to be crucified, by the way). Beyond these two truths, everything about Jesus is very foggy. If the Jews had executed Jesus, it would probably have been by stoning. We know that Jesus died alone; in the final moments of his life he was alone. When Jesus was arrested, “all” of the disciples “forsook him and fled” (Mark 14:50). It was only years after his death that the disciples assembled and pieced together memories of how they remembered him. This is how the passion plays and sermons about him gained popularity. As the passion plays about the remembered Jesus were being performed the writings of the Gospels took place. Eminent Jesus Seminar scholar, Professor Dominic Crossan enraged evangelical apologetics when He suggested that the body of Jesus was probably left to be eaten by dogs. Who will dispute that when all his followers forsook him? Bishop Spong has suggested that the Gospels came into written form as the disciples realized the expected second coming and end of the world was not going to happen soon. This was after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. The destruction of the temple is quoted in Matt. 24:34. They then decided to put the memory of Jesus, as he was remembered through *midrashic* plays, into written form for future generations. The first written account of the last events in Jesus’ life did not come into being for a minimum of thirty five years and a maximum of seventy years after his death. By the time the Gospels came into written form all eyewitnesses had apparently passed away. The following events and characters, according to the best modern scholars, never happened:

- **Judas Iscariot** - There was never a literal person named Judas Iscariot. This was simply a legendary figure invented by the Christians into their passion plays, as a way to place on the backs of the Jewish people the blame for the death of Jesus. Judas’ story is a *midrashic* reconstruction drawn from bits and pieces of the Jewish sacred tradition. The betrayal

story and the “thirty pieces of silver” are drawn from the Book of Zechariah 11: 1-15 and other many Old Testament writings. For example, John went on to identify the text that inspired this story as coming from the Psalms, “*Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me*” (Ps. 41:9).

- **Pontius Pilate** - This was a literary story created to exonerate the Roman governor who did exist historically but was long dead when the story was written. The same goes for Barabbas who was portrayed as being released by Pilate. Most of the crucifixion details are midrashic techniques drawn from Psalm 22, Isaiah 52, 53, and many other Jewish sacrificial stories.
- **Passion Plays And Stories** – Scholars now agree that besides the fact of a historical Jesus living and being arrested by Roman soldiers, that is, after all the disciples and followers left him as Mark 14:50 indicated, the only literal thing that can be said with certainty is that Jesus became a global spiritual force after his arrest and eventual execution. Everything from the Lords supper, Pilate, Judas, Barabbas, the trial, Joseph of Aramathea, speaking angels, empty tombs, appearing and disappearing apparitions, vinegar, etc were all symbols that were reserved in their mythology of the Messiah. All these symbols are in the Old Testament and were read from there into the life of Jesus for a period of 35 to 70 years after his death. These stories and plays were created to account for the eruption of the Holy Spirit after the death of Jesus Christ. They were then incorporated into the Gospels as *midrashic* readings and plays that reminded them of Jesus Christ. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with all the above *midrashic* stories as long as they are not imposed by preachers as literal and factual truths.

For those who criticize and exhibit hysterical religious anger over the theology presented here, I leave you with Bishop Spong’s suggestion from his insightful book, *Liberating the Gospels – Reading the Bible with Jewish Eyes*:

Is that, as some of my critics have suggested, insufficient to account for the incredible eruption of power that marked the

dawn of Easter? May I suggest that such a criticism has validity only if those who employ it do not understand the power of the Spirit, or the presence of the living Christ in the least of these our brothers and sisters. Nor do they understand the power of the love of God that destroys human barriers that seek to block its path as it rushes toward universalism. The barrier between Jew and Samaritan was the first to fall. Next came, the barrier between Jew and gentile. As this life in the spirit rolled on through history, other barriers of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation have all fallen before its inclusive dimensions. Every barrier erected by proponents of a rigid orthodoxy has fallen. The barriers that suggested that God's love was limited to Catholic Christians only or to Protestant Christians only have fallen. The barriers that defend Jews, Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists, and other religious systems of the world as beyond the reach of the love of God are today tottering before our eyes. This enormous power comes not from ancient tales that suggest that three days or so after the crucifixion of Jesus people saw him alive; it comes rather from the realization born at Easter that Jesus was and is a new revelation of God – an incarnation, if you will, that he has entered into the meaning of God, that he is the source of life-changing, life-enhancing Spirit of God that will finally bind us into one human family. It was not a ghost-like apparition that convinced human beings of this truth. It was an eye opening new consciousness that enabled some of our spiritual forebears to peer beyond the boundaries of time and space into the reality of God where Jesus was now perceived to be alive and from whom a divine and holy spirit flowed to those who had eyes to see...

The Easter story of Jesus' resurrection was thus not an action that occurred inside history, though when it was embraced, its effects were inside history. Resurrection was rather a revelation that emanated from the heart of God. It was not an event that occurred three days after the crucifixion. It was rather a window through which could be seen the timeless reality of the love of God as that love had been incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. To see Jesus as part of God was to see him beyond the boundary of human finitude.

In time, stories of Jesus' divine conception and of his resurrection from death at dawn of Easter would be the literalized way through which people would believe that they had captured in the objectivity of their words an understanding of the literal truth of this Jesus. They had not. They could not. The truth of Jesus could not have been captured by any human tale. For, his life was and is of God, and his death was seen as his re-entry into God and the life of God can never be entered with the words and stories of human beings. His was a life through which the spirit of the living God found access to the human family.

He broke the barrier that separates the human from the divine, the mortal from the immortal, and he called us to journey through him into the mystery and wonder of God that he had revealed. He was and he is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the door through which we walk to touch the meaning of God. He is the source of living water, that wonderful Jewish metaphor for the Spirit. He is the bread of life, for he satisfies the deepest hunger, the God hunger that dwells in the heart of every human being...This is the reality that lies behind Easter that we will discover when we have the courage to break the literalisms in which we have tried to capture this Jesus. Perhaps now we can see that unless we deliver the gospel of Jesus from these literal distortions, that gospel might as well die. He was crucified. That is the one objective historical truth in the creeds. All else in the creeds is but commentary on who it was who was crucified and what his life meant and means. Death could not contain him. Jesus, you are the Christ. We have seen the Lord. Those are the ecstatic faith affirmations that seek to capture that meaning.

It is the perpetual human tendency to think that literal words capture truth, when all they can ever do is point toward it. The failure of the Christian church over the past two thousand years has been the failure to capture the value of mythical symbols in scripture. A true story can be also symbolic and explanatory. However, in common usage a *myth* is a story that is not true. For some Christians, describing Christian beliefs, such as the literal resurrection of Christ as *myth* is therefore usually considered an attack on those beliefs. To even describe the

Bible as a book of myth (which it is) is also considered an attack on “the word of the Lord” by biblical literalists. Jesus Christ used parables like *The Prodigal Son* and *The Good Samaritan*, just to use the two as examples. These two stories never happened! They are very good stories about our lives. There is hardly a Christian who will tell me that these two stories do not describe their lives. These stories have been used for inspirational sermons millions of times over the past two thousand years. Our understanding of God had to be revised when the Copernican Revolution destroyed the divine dwelling place above the sky, in a three-tiered universe. These parables will be remembered long after the historic confessions and creeds have been forgotten. I heard a powerful anointed sermon on the resurrection of Lazarus the other day. I thought of the church as Lazarus. I knew that Lazarus will one day live again. The truth however remains; they are just mythical stories that never happened. Very inspiring, meaningful and wonderful stories though. We always disregard their mythical quality and concentrate on the truths that they communicate to our generations. Our western mind has always had trouble embracing the truth found in myth, legend, intuition, and poetry.

### **The wind of change**

The twenty claims listed at the beginning of this chapter, by Professor Bultmann, are in the similar vein also. They are mythical stories intended to foster Christian values or address spiritual traditions. To say that the Bible, like any other holy book, is a book of myths is not to undermine Christianity. Mythology is here to protect the sacred. For the past two thousand years Christianity has been famous as a religion that mixes truth with mythology, superstition and just plain nonsense, like talking legged snakes and talking animals, when these are taken literally. A literal reading of the Bible leads to contradictions and hysterical anger when these are pointed out. We forget that the Christian myth was born out of the Jewish myth which was born out of other myths when mythical Abraham was called out of the gods of his Father. Take the mythical story of Abraham for example; this is a wonderful story that communicates eternal truths even though archaeologists and historians tell us that there is no available evidence proving that there ever existed a person called Abraham. All the aesthetics that surround the Abraham story belong to a 1000 BC timeline; that is more than 1500 years later than the time of Abraham. We know that the OT Bible was put into final form around

1000 BC and became a canon of holy books only around 400 BC, after the Babylonian captivity. The Jewish mythical story of Abraham is truth nevertheless. We have to contend with the latter day Abrahams who are men of faith and crooks at the same time. The religious myth of the people of Israel and the myths Professor Bultmann talks about are simply the creation one particular group of people who interpreted the world and God from their perspective. We also need to find a way to capture our experience of God in the language of our day, we need to demythologize the myths we have been taught. The above list is sufficient to demonstrate that what Professor Bultmann demands is nothing less than a radical transformation of Christianity as we have known it. It is the end of Christianity as we have known it. The wind of change is blowing our traditional understanding of Christianity away. Every Reformation brings its own evolution. The following events that occurred after the Reformation has changed our uninformed, unquestioning, and ignorant approach to reading the Bible:

- **Nicolas Copernicus** (1473 – 1543) was a Christian scientist who used relatively primitive astronomical tools to study the universe in a new way. From then on, theologians, researchers, historians, archaeologists, and other learned folks changed the way we think about the skies and even about talking about the God who was presumed to live above the skies. He discovered that our universe is a globe where we find ourselves either on top or bottom of it depending on the time of the day. This meant that the word “heaven” had to be deconstructed in the light of the new science (knowledge). It was only in the year 2000 that Pope John Paul II announced that heaven and hell were not real places but just metaphors. Catholics know finally, that that was no place called heaven or hell. The mythical universe that furnished the frame of reference for our Western myths and creeds for more than two thousand years has crumbled.
- **Galileo- Galileo** (1564 – 1642) rendered the New Testament worldview meaningless. The entire biblical frame of reference was challenged by Galileo’s finding that the earth was the centre of the universe and the earth rotated around the sun. We now had to revise the perception of the universe and the place of the planet earth within that universe. The Church then, challenged Galileo and forced him to choose between recanting and death. The first Christian to be killed for beliefs was Priscillian of Avila.

He and six of his followers were beheaded for asking his followers to read the Bible. This was illegal then. The same Church burnt scientist Giordano Bruno to death on 17 February 1600 for insisting, in opposition to the church, that the earth revolved around the sun. The same Church apologized only in 1991 (after 350 years) and admitted that Galileo was right and the Bible was wrong. The text used to challenge the work of Galileo was Joshua 10:12, where Joshua reportedly ordered the sun to stand still in the sky, while He was busy killing people. In Zulu we say, “ulibambe lingashoni!”

- **Isaac Newton** (1643 – 1727) who came within a century of Galileo; was an English physicist who demonstrated in intimate detail how the universe operated with mathematical precision according to fixed physical laws. Today, we know that we live in an ordered world in which mathematically precise natural laws govern a clockwork universe. Newton demonstrated that there are natural explanations for many of the things that in generations past had been considered mysteries attributed solely to the power of God. We began to understand that earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, floods, etc do not express any divine opinion about anyone’s goodness or lack of it. Newton’s discoveries were a blow to the biblical world of miracles and magic. It seems like the Biblical world was not governed exclusively by the laws of physics about which Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton wrote. Miracle and magic have faded from our world.
- **Charles R Darwin** (1809 – 1882) was the first scientist to introduce the concept of a great gap that separated the human from the subhuman forms. Today, the whole field of biology and medicine assumes that the principles of Charles Darwin are true. School textbooks from grade one across the whole world have incorporated the principles of Darwinian evolution into their content. We live today, on the other side of Charles Darwin, whose thought has destroyed most of the Bible's presuppositions. For Darwin there never was a perfect creation. Life rather evolved over billions of years from a single cell into self-conscious complexity. Without original perfection there could have been no human fall into sin. If there was no human fall, there was no need for a divine rescue. No one can be rescued

from a fall that never happened or be restored to a status one has never possessed. So the basis upon which bible writers constructed their concept of salvation has become inoperative. The universal experience that they sought to address may well still be real, but this explanation has been destroyed by the march of time. We however still have Christians insisting that our kids should be taught about a literal God who came to a literal garden, walked up and down, looking for a literal somebody who tasted a forbidden fruit. This is happening in the 21<sup>st</sup> century scientific age. It shows how far deep our religious delusions are. All of medical science assumes the truth of evolution; and the discovery of DNA took away the last vestige of the suggestion that it was still “an unapproved theory”. The evolution debate is the most bitter battle because of its implications; if the Bible is found wanting in its account of creation (genesis of everything), how can we be sure of it anywhere? Recent discoveries, of some 2 million year old fossilised skeletons at our own backyard, should dispel all doubts about our origins.

- **Albert Einstein** (1879 – 1955) who, long before globalization became the buzzword, destabilized both time and space by seeing those not as external properties, but as significantly related aspects of existence. He also introduced relativity as something present in all things, including that which religious people had once called “eternal and unchanging truths”. Einstein also put nails into the coffin of the concept that human life was the purpose of creation. He rendered our traditional concepts of both time and space to be less than objective categories, and he demonstrated the relativity of all articulated truth. It was Einstein who first suggested that the most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mysterious. A mystery is not something anyone solves, but something we live with and allow it to touch us in mysterious ways. He suggested that behind anything that can be experienced there is something that our minds cannot grasp; whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly.
- **Sigmund Freud** (1856 – 1933) was a psychologist who probed the inner recesses of the human psyche and came with an analysis that was a devastating attack on the credibility of traditional religious thinking. For many years the church lived in

denial of psycho-therapy. He destroyed the naive religious assumptions that had portrayed God as either a rewarding or a punishing parent figure. Many religious people were stunned to learn from Freud that most of our behaviour and thinking is directed by the subconscious mind and not the conscious mind. We now know that our conscious mind processes about 2 000 bits of information per second while our subconscious mind processes 4 billion bits of information per second. The extraordinary power of the subconscious mind was now responsible for behaviour that was not understandable before Freud's findings. Was the Apostle Paul not talking about this when he complained that the very thing he wanted to avoid doing was what he always seemed to do, and what he wanted to do he did not? (Rom.7:15,19) Freud suggested that all religious systems represented an infantile neurosis from which human beings would someday emerge as mature adults. He exposed the power needs that organized religion had developed in which to hide from truth. The Biblical God would have to punish human beings eternally for unconscious behaviour that was well beyond the control of the conscious mind.

### **Lessons from the Enlightenment**

It was only after the period we now call the Enlightenment that it became acceptable for anyone to question religion. The church pretended to know better all along. It would not tolerate an opposing viewpoint, especially if it came from science. The church is now paying the price. Today, according to Roger Jones in *Physics for the Rest of Us*, "*it is science that dictates to the church and not vice versa...It is science and not religion that gives today's world its rationale, morality, sustenance, and story of creation, such as it is.*". Today, we no longer go to the Bible or Priest to find answers to cataclysmic events like earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes etc. We go to science to find answers and explanations to these. Science has become our new God. We no longer understand the modern global scientific universe through the spectacles borrowed from holy books. We read holy books using spectacles borrowed from the global scientific universe. The drivel that was spewed by right-wing televangelist, Pat Robertson, after the recent Haiti earthquake that killed more than two hundred thousand people was ignored by all media. Robertson claimed that the quake was a result of a "curse" because Haiti was founded on "a

pact with the devil” by the previous leaders in the nineteenth century. If evangelist Robertson had gone to scientist for answers, they would have informed him that Haiti had three other big earthquakes in 1701, 1751 (which destroyed Port-au-Prince), and 1770. This was even before the “curse” that Robertson mentioned. Robertson should have enquired from science before he made his comments; scientists would have told him that the recent Haiti earthquake was just an aftershock of the 1751 earthquake. There will be another aftershock or more in the future. We all look to science for answers to the most perplexing problems of our universe. It was out these assumptions that Professor Bultmann found that the primary theological structures of the Church, including its doctrines and dogmas, depended on a literal view of scripture which was no longer intellectually defensible. The recent expansion of knowledge has now led to place where biblical assumptions are being challenged despite the personal cost to the challenger.

As I said earlier, I am fortunate to be living in my time and always thank God that I am living today rather than 300 years ago. Three hundred years ago I would have been dragged into a heresy court, found guilty as charged, and burnt alive by now. What are the implications of this expansion of knowledge? We can no longer talk about human beings being a special creation made in the image of God. We can no longer talk about a human perfection from which we have fallen away. We can no longer talk about the original sin. There can no longer be talk of a fall from a perfect creation in the Garden of Eden if there has never been a perfect creation. How can we be restored to something which we have never been? All of the atonement theories; the atonement stories, stories of Jesus dying for our sins, Jesus as a sacrifice or ransom, and all talk of Jesus in Jewish mythology. The Bible is a Jewish book, was written by people who were Jews, who thought as Jews, embraced the world as Jews, understood reality as Jews, and interpreted the known world under a Jewish frame. These Jewish creeds and interpretations have served us well for the past two thousand years. They were human constructs to describe the God experience found in Jesus Christ. In the new reformation, we will have to rethink the way we have told the Jesus story. We can no longer be talking to “fallen sinners” who need to be restored. The mantra that “Jesus died for my sins” will have to be retired as we emerge out of Jewish myths. The traditional meaning of the Lords Supper will be revised to its original meaning of sharing a meal with whoever is hungry. Being hungry will be the only requirement for sharing The Lords Supper. We will have to recognize that we are addressing those who have

not yet achieved their status of being fully human rather than fallen sinners. We will see our new image of Jesus Christ as the one who empowers us to be fully human. People will flock to our churches in order to gain more of their humanity that enables them to love like Jesus loved.

To say that the new reformation will take Christianity into a major transition is an understatement. This is a real revolution coming to the Church. There will definitely be death in the church before the resurrection. Old wineskins will be destroyed before this new wine is poured into new wineskins. We just need to be conversant with church history and the character of the Christian movement since the emperor Constantine inaugurated Christianity as a religion of the Roman Empire in 325 CE. The world has changed dramatically since then. We no longer live in a three-storied universe which our historical creeds still take for granted. We know that there is no longer any literal heaven above the skies or a literal hell below the earth. The world is a globe that tilts around the sun in a clock timed universe. Our universe is always on time, it never fails to do its work according to the forces and laws of nature. As modernist and post-modernist believers, we feel the impelling need to harmonize our faith with our new scientific understanding of world. The biblical world-view and the new scientific world-view are on a collision course. Bultmann suggested that we should demythologise, then, re-interpret or re-mythologise the scriptures so that it can be in harmony with the new scientific world-view. He called upon theologians of our era to serve their generation as the first disciples served theirs by making the Gospels more acceptable to a more sophisticated generation of believers and by continuing the work of composing the Gospels in accordance with modern ideas. He suggested that Biblical mythology be interpreted rather than eliminated totally. Professors, Bultmann, Borg, Macquarrie, together with Bishop Spong have become my primary teachers in reading the Bible again for the first time. I am no longer concerned about discovering whether certain biblical events actually occurred or not. I no longer ask, "Did it really happen?" or "Is it true?"

The question that I ask of any scripture in the Bible is, "What does it mean to me today? What lessons am I learning from this sacred text?" Of course it may still be necessary to eliminate mythology here and there. This book addresses the mythology of "the second coming of Christ". It is my humble attempt to conceptualize God independently of the traditional second coming of Christ myth, a myth which no longer tenable or ethical. Like St Paul who had a passion for Jews in his cultural milieu, I also am

concerned that evangelicals (my tribe) will be left behind with their *Left Behind* novels (The *Left Behind* novel has now sold more than 50 million copies). Like the Apostle Paul of old, I pray for my evangelical tribe. Are evangelicals missing the second coming of Christ the same way the Jewish tribe missed the first coming? It is for this reason that I pray for evangelicals even when they keep on telling me that they are praying for me to come where they are. I have been where they are. I want them to come where I am. For the past two thousand years the Church has been awed by this terminology “**The Second Coming**”, this word has now become our daily bread, even the subject of endless jokes and political lobbying. When politicians convince the masses of how long they will be in power, they say “until Jesus comes”. When they say this, the average person knows that they actually mean forever!

## **The value of Christian mythology**

I am the first to concede that Christian mythology has a lot of value. I am who I am today thanks to Christian mythology. Myth is there, not for truth, but to offer security to our fragile lives. I understand better than many people the appeal that comes from religious myths that offer security. I also understand why some people will react in hysterical anger when that sense of security is disturbed. The problem that the Church has had to deal with throughout history is this; if the Church provides truth it cannot provide security, conversely; if the Church provides security, it cannot provide truth. For this reason God calls some of us out of the Church system in order to provide truth. Human religious systems have never been primarily a search for truth; they have always been first and foremost a search for security. Mythology has helped a lot of people across all religions to build within them a haven of peace that enables them to live creatively with the sorrow of life. Religion is not such a bad thing as many have said. Many people will never face another day without religious belief. Their lives will fall apart like Humpty Dumpty. Theirs will be a meaningless and hopeless life. Many-many people across the universe find their sense of security in religion. This has been happening from time immemorial. But, it has also to be acknowledged that a lot of evil has been done in the name of religious belief and associated myths. Religious wars have been among the history’s most cruel wars and we have seen devout religious Christians engage in crusades, slave trade, apartheid, women subjugation and many other evil deeds.

Myth has been called a primitive form of psychology. Most Christian and other religious myths are still adhered to today; though they belong to a primitive stage of human evolution. However, myths do save a lot of lives and do help a lot of people to live creatively in our confusing world. I have said these words to emphasize the fact that I do not take religion lightly and do not intend to destroy anyone's religion. Some people reading this book will slowly find themselves evolving from religious myth (*mythos*) to *truth* (reason). Religion does not give truth, but it does give security, a lot of security. I am not advocating the throwing away of traditional belief systems, especially if they are a source of meaning to you. If the mythical world, mythical hymns, mythical liturgies, mythical sermons and mythical biblical stories give you happiness and peace of soul, go ahead and enjoy them. The decision is yours, dear reader; you have to choose between peace of soul and truth. You prefer happiness and peace of soul – then believe what you believe and just leave this book alone. You want truth – then enquire further into this book. The happy state of a human being is to live in unquestioning loyalty; it is a state of total and absolute certainty. This book definitely disrupts that state. It is only inside religion where human beings manage to hide from both reality and the complexity of truth. Dr Daphney Hampson in her book *Theology and Feminism* has suggested that the path of the future is towards post-Christianity: “to find a method of viewing God independently of the Christian myth, and in today's language. In doing so, we “*shall be doing no more than did others in their time, drawing on the cultural milieu in which they lived.*”

## Chapter 5 - The history of the Second Coming

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*Believe nothing just because a so-called wise person said it.*

*Believe nothing just because a belief is generally held*

*Believe nothing just because it is said in ancient books*

*Believe nothing just because it is said to be of divine origin*

*Believe nothing just because someone believes it*

*Believe only what you - yourself- test and judge to be true*

*Siddhartha Gautama (The Buddha)*

*The farther backward you can look;*

*the farther forward you are likely to see*

*Winston Churchill*

There is no book that has been used and abused like the Bible when communicating the subject of the *Second Coming of Christ*. It is opportune to state that there are no words “the second coming of Christ” in any Bible. In the previous chapter I have already stated how the second coming terminology evolved. The subject of suffering really captures my mind. I struggle with the God idea like Jacob of old when it comes to this subject. I have studied every book I could find

on the subject of suffering. New Testament scholar, Professor Bart Erhman, in his book, *God's Problem*, has done an exhaustive study of suffering and what the Bible says about it. He went through a great extent to look at a range of biblical answers to the problem of suffering. Let us take a brief look at the connection between human suffering and the desire for the end of that suffering through the ending of the world or in our case, *The Second Coming of Christ*.

## **2800 BCE**

According to *Isaac Asimov's Book of Facts* (1979), an Assyrian clay tablet dating approximately 2800 BC was unearthed bearing the words “*Our earth is degenerate in these latter days. There are signs that the world is speedily coming to an end. Bribery and corruption are common.*” This is one of the earliest (4800 years ago) examples of the perception of moral decay in society being interpreted as a sign of the imminent end of the world. 4800 years ago, they believed the world was going to end in their generation.

## **1000 BCE**

Apocalyptic thinking gripped ancient cultures especially the Jews and the Romans. The Assyrians invaded Palestine in 721 BCE and conquered the Jews. The Jews were later captured and taken into Babylonian captivity by 586 BC. It was during this captivity that the Bible came into written form. The biblical myth of creation in genesis was written out of Babylonian exile. Jews had lost their Davidic kingdom. Jewish people were carried away into captivity in a very foreign land. Apocalyptic writings flourished in Judaism from about 200 BCE to 100 CE. In the Hebrew Bible, the second half of the book of Daniel, written around 165 BCE, is the most sustained example. During this period, their Prophets, including Daniel, were also taken into captivity and began writing their letters. The Jews were later allowed to return to Palestine but got involved in more wars and fell under Greek domination under Alexander the Great. By the time Jesus was born more wars had ensued and Jews were now under the Roman ruler – Herod the Great. The Greco-Roman belief system was born during this period. It was in this captivity where the belief in Satan evolved into human consciousness. The Bible was first put into written form through the years of captivity as the Jews remembered

their history. The promise of God was now meaningless. The Jewish people were now living under Gentile domination, without a King anointed by God. They longed for a King and the return of their Davidic monarchy since then, until today. Even after 1948, when Israel became a Nation again, the struggle for their liberation from dark forces that want to eliminate them from the face of the earth has remained.

## **1st century**

Jesus is quoted saying, “*Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here, which shall not taste death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*” (Matt. 16:28) This implies that *The Second Coming* would take place within the lifetime of his contemporaries, and indeed the Apostles expected Jesus to return before the passing of their generation. Mathew 23:24 implied that the temple would be destroyed before the coming of Jesus. The temple was destroyed in 70 CE, before the Gospels were put into written form. When Mathew wrote in 85 CE, he had the destroyed temple, where “no stone was left unturned” in his background. What is contained in Mathew 24 and the most of the Gospels is the remembered life of Jesus. Mathew was written more 50 years after Jesus’ death and more than 15 years after the destruction of the temple spoken about.

## **70 C.E**

There was a major Jewish revolt against the Romans in 66 – 70. Many Jews saw this war as the final end-time battle. The Jewish temple was totally destroyed by the Romans. For many Christians, this was the end of the world. Disillusionment set in after the war. We see this disillusionment in the writings of the Apostles where they had to explain to the first century church why Jesus’ coming delayed.

## **100 C.E**

This was the end of the first century and many Christians were very disillusioned that the promised second coming of Christ had not taken place. We know this by reading all scriptural sayings related to the second coming. Apostle Peter had to do his own spin in 11 Peter “a day is like a thousand years...” The Apostle Paul, who expected the

coming of the Lord by sleeping with his clothes (pyjamas) on because he did not want the Lord to find him naked. All the first century Christians expected the Lord to come in their generation. Apostles Paul and Peter had both died by the year 70 C.E when the war broke out and the temple was destroyed. In the next chapter I discuss the origins of this second coming belief and how the destruction of the temple led to the post 70 C.E writing of the Gospels.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> century**

The Montanists believed that Christ would come again within their lifetimes and establish a new Jerusalem. Montanism was the first bona fide doomsday cult. Rome celebrated its thousandth year in 247 CE. The Romans increased their persecution of Christians, so much that many Christians believed that the end had arrived.

## **3<sup>rd</sup> century**

Hilary of Poitiers predicted the world would end in 365 CE. The Donatists, a North African Christian sect headed by Tyconius, looked forward to the world ending in 380 CE.

## **4<sup>th</sup> Century**

St. Martin of Tours (316 – 397) wrote, “*There is no doubt that the Antichrist has already been born. Firmly established already in his early years, he will, after reaching maturity, achieve supreme power.*” This was the time when the church was battling with the formulation of our historic creeds.

## **5th century**

Roman theologian Sextus Julius Africanus claimed that the end would occur 6000 years after creation. He assumed that there were 5531 years between the creation and the resurrection, and thus expected the Second Coming to take place no later than 500 CE. Theologians, Hippolytus and Irenaeus, believing that Christ would return 6000 years after creation, also anticipated parousia in 500 CE .

## 600 CE - 995 CE

In 793 CE, Bishop Elipandus prophesied the end of the world in the presence of many followers. His followers, thinking that the world was ending that night, fasted through the night. Bishop Gregory of Tours calculated the end of the world occurring between 799 and 806. Prophetess Thiota declared the world will end in 848; others said 970, Bernard Thuringa said 992. By 995 mystics were calculating the end in three years.

## 1000 - 1500 CE

Around the year 1000, legend has it that “panic terror” gripped Europe. It was their Y1K apocalyptic time. In 950 a monk named Adso predicted the coming of the anti-Christ and the end of the world by 1000. Millennial expectations were in the horizon. On December 31, 999, thousands of people packed St. Peter's Basilica in Rome to witness the end of the world. After Jesus failed to return in 1000, some mystics pushed the end to the thousand anniversary of the crucifixion, 1033. The writings of Rudulfus Glaber describe a rash of millennial paranoia during this period. Pope Innocent III expected the second coming in 1284, this was 666 years after the rise of Islam. The Bubonic plague (black-death disease) occurring in 1347 - 1350 was the final straw. Within a three year period, a third of Europe had died – 25 million people were dead. Bishops were burying thousands of people every day for three years. Many Bishops started making statements like, “Life will not get better than this.” Most of Europeans never thought humanity will see the year 1400. Look at where we are 650 years later?

## 1500 - 1900 CE

Martin Luther was one of hundreds of preachers who believed that the end would occur no later than 1600. This was after the Reformation that swept the whole world. Other Reformers shared Martin Luther's view that the Second Coming would occur in their life time. In his, *The Book of Prophecies*, Christopher Columbus claimed that the world was created in 5343 BC, and would last 7000 years. He then predicted the world would end in 1658. Sabbatai Zevi calculated the coming of the Messiah to 1666, which was the sum of 1000 plus 666, the number

of the Anti-Christ.. Despite his failed other prophecies, he had accumulated a great number of followers. According to John Napier's calculation, it was going to be 1700. Devout Methodist, John Bell, saw the end in 1763. The French Revolution and other civil wars occurring during these years were signs of the end of the world for many who lived then. The great American preacher Jonathan Edwards believed that the Great Awakening was a sign of the coming millennium. He predicted that the world would end in 1866. There were at least 800 predictions per each century during this period. It is of historical record that, all The Great Awakening Revivalist preached and predicted about the Second Coming of Christ in their generation.

### **1900 - 1950 CE**

The Catholic Apostolic Church saw the end in 1901. The beginning of World War I in 1914 was viewed as the battle of Armageddon by many religious people. Between 1918 and 1920 some 80 to 100 million people worldwide died from a deadly strain flu epidemic. 25 million people died in 25 weeks (compared with HIV/AIDS which killed 25 million people in 25 years). But Jesus did not come, even after this. In 1948 Israel became a nation again after 2500 years. This was after 6 million Jews were killed in Hitler's death camps. Most of the Revivalists, including Oral Roberts and Gordon Lindsay predicted the coming of Jesus by 1950. In 1950 Billy Graham stated, "*We may have another year, maybe two years. Then I believe it is going to be over.*" This was after it was calculated that more than 50 million people had died in the two world wars. Jesus did not (literally) come after the two world wars.

### **1951 - 1988 CE**

Herbert Armstrong made five Rapture predictions during this period. The Jehovah's Witnesses made 11 predictions of the end of the world. David A Latimer, in his book, *Opening of the Seven Seals*, predicted that the Second Coming would take place in 1956 or 1958. A Mormon by the name of George Williams predicted 9 August 1969 as the day of the second coming. William Branham set 1977 as the date of Armageddon. In 1978 a cult leader by the name of Jim Jones ordered the members of his cult to commit suicide because "it was time." More than 900 of his followers died. In his book *Armageddon*,

Stephen Swihart predicted the End would occur sometime in the 1980's. Evangelist Pat Robertson predicted the end would occur in the fall of 1982. In his book, *I Predict*, Evangelist Lester Sumrall predicted 1985 as the end of the world. Hal Lindsey's bestseller *The Late Great Planet Earth*, suggested that the Rapture would take place in 1988, reasoning that it was 40 years (one biblical generation) after Israel gained statehood. I've already mentioned Edgar C Whisenant's 1988 prediction. Colin Deal wrote a book entitled, *Christ Returns by 1988: 101 Reasons Why*.

### **1989 - 1999 CE**

In his book *Guide to Survival*, Salem Kirban used Bishop Ussher's calculations to conclude that 1989 would be the year of the Rapture. Baptist preacher Peter Ruckman predicted that the Rapture would come around 1990. Christian author Dorothy Miller in her book, *Watch and be Ready! 1992 Millions Disappear?* Predicted the "last trumpet" would sound on Rosh Hashanah, heralding the Second Coming. Kenneth Hagin predicted the Rapture for October 1997. Nostradamus's "Great King of Terror" predictions failed on 24 July 1999 and September 1999. 23 October 1997 was the 6000th anniversary of "creation" according to the calculations of 17th century Archbishop James Usher; this date became the most popular candidate for the end of the world. On September 1999 was the end of the world, according to Evangelist Jack Van Impe. There were at least 50 other "prophets" similar to these ones who wrote books about the imminent return of Jesus in the ten years leading to 2000.

### **2000 - 2010 CE**

There's something about those three zeroes that made 2000 the most favourite year amongst doomsday prophets. There are just too many doomsday predictions to list for 2000. Those who predicted that the end of the world would occur in 2000 are too numerous to mention. Even a scientist like Isaac Newton was bitten by the millennium bug. He predicted that Christ's Millennium would begin in the year 2000. More than one hundred books were published all over the world, all predicting the end of the world in 2000. Compounding people's apocalyptic hopes and fears for 2000 was a technological problem that came to be known as Y2K. Jerry Falwell foresaw God pouring out his

judgement on the world on New Year's Day. According to Falwell, God "*may be preparing to confound our language, to jam our communications, scatter our efforts, and judge us for our sin and rebellion against his lordship. We are hearing from many sources that January 1, 2000, will be a fateful day in the history of the world.*" (Christianity Today; 11 January 1999). What did come after 2000 was the World Trade Centre attacks of 11 September 2001. If there is a day that doomsday prophets should have foreseen, it is this day. However, **nobody** was able to predict this event but continued predicting The Second Coming up to today. I write this after watching American Evangelist, Jack Van Impe, predicting that Jesus is coming long before President Obama's first term is over. This January's Joy Magazine led with the news that the Second Coming of Christ is very near.

## **2011 - 2040 CE**

An evangelical scholar by the name of Harold Camping (88), who claims to have read the Bible for the past seventy years, has predicted that the world will end on 21 May 2011. Solara Antara of the Doorway movement has predicted 31 December 2011 as the date in which "doom will strike" the world. The ancient Mayan calendar has predicted 23 December 2012 as the end of the world. The "Prophet Gabriel" of the Sword of God Brotherhood says the "dying time" will come in 2017. George Madray predicts a Yom Kippur Parousia in 2020. In her book, *The Call to Glory*, psychic Jeane Dixon wrote, "*The years 2020 – 2037, approximately, hail the true Second Coming of Christ. The Battle of Armageddon is to take place in 2020.*" Pyramidologist Max Toth has predicted the physical reincarnation of Jesus occurring in 2040.

### **21 December 2012 – The End Of The World As We Know It?**

Eschatology is the study of the last things. Every major religion has some kind of eschatology or teaching about how everything is finally going to end. Muslims talk about the coming of their Mahdi, or Messiah, who will convert the world to Islam and rule in peace and prosperity. Buddhists reject the idea of a definitive end of all things; rather, they envision endless cycles of life and death that can ultimately lead to Nirvana, a state of complete awakening. Like Buddhists, Hindus also view time in cycles and believe that we are living in "the age of darkness," the last four periods that constitute the

current age. Most Hindus believe that the world will ultimately be destroyed in an apocalypse and then recreated. Jews believe in the coming of the Messiah, for the first time. Orthodox Christians believe in the literal second coming of Jesus to earth, the bodily resurrection of all people, and a final judgement. Then there is the current 2012 phenomenon which is basically a New Age eschatology. It is the New Age movement's answer to how the world will end, or at least how; the world as we know it will end (TEOTWAWKI – the end of the world as we know it).

The New Age movement has adopted the Mayan calendar as the centrepiece for its view of how this world will end and the next one will begin. The ancient Mayans point to December 21, 2012 as the end, or possibly a new beginning. This date relates to a calendar developed by the ancient Mayan civilisation that was centred in the Peninsula of Mexico. The Mayans society flourished from about 250 to 900 CE. The Mayans experienced a sudden and unexplained collapse just before the year 1000 CE. They excelled in mathematics and astronomy. They are famous for making very accurate calculation. They were a very gifted people. Without the help of calculators, computers, or telescopes, they were able to determine the length of a lunar month to be 29, 53020 days. Many have accused the New Age movement of using the Mayan predictions about the end of the world in 2012 to create mass hysteria. Some people are not aware that scientists are also predicting solar flare activity in 2012. Some people expect 2012 to be a dramatic end to the world while others are talking about a glorious new beginning or rebirth of humanity. Others believe it will be both, the end and the beginning. It is just a prelude to a new global renewal; a new view of seeing things. According to Lawrence Joseph in *Apocalypse 2012*:

The Mayan calendar tells us what's ahead for the whole world. On 21 December 2012 our Solar System, with the Sun at its centre, will as the Maya have for millennia maintained, eclipse the view from Earth of the centre of the Milky Way. This happens only once every 26,000 years. Ancient Mayan astronomers considered this centre spot to be the Milky Way's womb, a belief now supported by voluminous evidence that that's where the galaxy's stars are created. Astronomers now suspect that there is a black hole right at the centre sucking up the matter, energy, and time

that will serve as raw materials for the creation of future stars. In other words, whatever energy typically streams to Earth from the centre of the Milky Way will indeed be disrupted on 21 December 2012, at 11:11 pm Universal Time, for the first time in 26, 000 years. 2012 is destined to be a year of unprecedented turmoil and upheaval; whether the birth agony of a New Age or simply the death throes of our current era; a disturbing confluence of scientific, religious, and historical trends indicates that an onslaught of disasters and revelations, man-made, natural, and quite possibly supernatural, will culminate tumultuously. There is at least an even chance of some massive tragedy and/or great awakening occurring or commencing in that year.

All 2012 watchers agree that this will indeed be a year of tremendous change. It might as well be the defining moment of momentous change. Many, including this writer, predicted a kinder, gentler time of transformation and the beginning of a new era in global consciousness. 2012 might as well be the dawn of a new golden age in human evolution. It will bring about an age of awakening in our spiritual consciousness. There are signs of this globally already. Many are talking of “the birth of our higher selves,” “a pole shift in our collective psyche,” “the birth of a new species: homo spiritus,” “the gateway to a new epoch of planetary development with a radically different kind of consciousness,” and various forms of renewals or better understanding of the spiritual world. There is basically not much difference from what we evangelicals call “the great revival,” it only that it does not come through the people we expected and its nature is totally different from our expectations.

A noted Mesoamerican cosmology expert by the name of John Major Jenkins has the following view in the book, *Maya Cosmogogenesis*:

My metaphorical interpretation is the Maya believed that around the year we call 2012, a large chapter in human history will be coming to an end. All the values and assumptions of the previous World Age will expire, and a new phase of human growth will commence. The ancient Maya understood something about the nature of the cosmos and the spiritual evolution of humanity that has gone unrecognized in our worldview. The understanding involves

our alignment with the centre of the Galaxy, our cosmic centre and source, and identifies 2012 as a time of tremendous transformation and opportunity for spiritual growth, a transition from one World Age to another. Around the year we call 2012 a large chapter in human history will be coming to an end. All the values and assumptions of the previous World Age will expire, and a new phase of human growth will commence.

Finally, 21 December 2012 (or around this time as signs are showing) is not about the final end, it is only about the end of the beginning. Theoretically, scientists have informed us that in about four and half billion years the sun will swell into a giant red star. The sun will then swallow Mercury, Venus, Earth, and perhaps Mars or whichever stars will be here at that time. That will be the true end of the world. It is only five billion years away. For now, we see 2012 as the end of an age and the beginning of another. It will bring about the transformation of our consciousness and a quantum jump in our spiritual understanding. We are now living in the midst of our histories grandest spiritual understanding. This may as well lead to a new harmonic and utopian situation on earth. 21 December 2012 is indeed the end of the world as we know it, and the beginning of a world we are anticipating. Many believe that the spiritual progress that comes with the current global awakening will be the factor that solves the social, political, economic, environmental, and other problems that vex humanity. This is what I call *The Second Coming of Christ*.

## The Bible and the second coming of Christ

The biggest problem with fundamentalism is that it causes Christians to take Biblical Scripture literally when they are not supposed to; and where Christians are supposed to take the Bible literally, they do not do it. Biblical teaching regarding the last days is what is supposed to be taken literally – last days, as in **Last Days**. The last days the Bible speaks about expired in the literal last days of the Bible – the period between 70 CE and 100 CE. These were the real last days that are the subject of all “last days” sayings in the Bible. Every verse in the Bible that mentions last days; means the period between 70 C.E to 100 C.E when the canon was closed. Let us take the most famous verse that has been used over the past two thousand years; Matthew 24:34 “this

generation shall not pass away...” Many Christians are not aware that the Gospel of Mathew was written well after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E had become a part of Jewish reality. The Temple; thought of as the dwelling place for the Holy God, was razed to the ground, leaving only one wall standing. At this wall the Jews have mourned and wailed ever since. It is called the “wailing” wall. One cannot visit Jerusalem and miss the “wailing wall”. Every day, Jewish people gather there and wail over the destruction. The buildings of Jerusalem were reduced to rubble, “no stone left unturned”, as Mathew read this back after the destruction. Jerusalem had become a devastated, destroyed, dead city; as Bishop Spong says, “*and with that death the Jewish nation, for all practical purposes, came to an end.*” Matthew was written between 80 C.E and 82 C.E according to most scholars. Everything described in Matthew 24 had already taken place with the wars that erupted with the destruction of the temple by Roman soldiers. Mathew, Luke, John, Acts, Revelation, and some books attributed to Paul, are all post – 70 literary works. There are scholars who will then argue that Mark was written pre – 70. Scholars call the chapter 13 of Mark “the Little Apocalypse” because it is reminiscent of the apocalyptic writing style present elsewhere in the Bible, by which they mean writing about signs that will accompany “the end of the world”. Some people think that there were no earthquakes, wars, rumours of wars, famines, persecutions, a darkened sun and moon, etc before these were written in the Gospels. Some are not aware that Mathew 24 was written after a devastating war. These painful events have always been a part of our evolution and will continue to be a part of our evolution for the next million years or so. For the Jews an earthquake, a darkened sun and moon accompanied a divine revelation. The science of solar eclipses was not known then. This is how mythology was used to develop theology. Even in the 21st century, there are still Christians who use disasters that have always been a part of humanity for hundreds of years to predict the end of the world. This is happening in our age of modern science.

The Son of Man that Mark spoke about is the same one Daniel spoke about. Jesus also spoke about the coming of this Son of Man, not knowing that He – **Jesus** – was actually that **Son Of Man**. This is how the teaching of the second coming of Christ began after the death of Jesus. When the early church realised that – **Oh! Jesus was actually the Son of Man!** Then the whole spiritual experience was

re-invented to then predict that Jesus is coming again, and that coming was going to happen soon – as in soon and very soon. That soon and very soon was expected to be long before 70 C.E. There are however, similarities between the emergence of Christianity out of Judaism and the emergence of the modern secular world out of Christianity. First century Christians looked for a new world to come, but it was not a spiritual world in the sky but a physical world like this, to replace the present one. As the author of Revelation put it: “I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.” It was only when that new world failed to arrive that something happened. As time passed and Jesus did not come as anticipated, worry began to set in. To make matters worse, war broke out and the Temple was destroyed. We see this disillusionment in the book of Peter where believers started questioning the second coming. This was a literal questioning by a first century church. It was not written for us to do the same questioning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It was a questioning in the first century for literal events of the first century. The desperation and hopelessness was a first century reality. It called for a response from the Apostles at the time.

In I Thessalonians, written about the year 51 and thus Paul's first epistle, he was concerned about the fact that the *Second Coming of Christ* had not yet arrived. Why, they wondered, had Jesus not returned by now to inaugurate the desired kingdom of God on earth? Paul tries anxiously to explain the delay. In Galatians, his second epistle, we see the white hot anger that separated Paul from those he called "the Judaizers," who are symbolized in Galatians by James, the Lord's brother, and by Peter, both of whom were demanding that all converts keep the Torah and only be allowed to come into Christianity by way of Judaism. Paul, deeply touched by what he came to call "grace," would never submit to this legalistic point of view from which he had fled, namely that salvation came through one's deeds, one's obedience to the Torah. The writer of the Epistle of Peter admonished them to be patient and used a strange reasoning that “a day with God is like a thousand”. This writer did not know that the universe is estimated to be 15 billion years old. If He had the information He would have said something like, “a day with God is like a thousand billion years”. It was then after this questioning, desperation, and the realization that the second coming was not imminent. The Apostles; Paul and Peter, who were the primary disciples, had died by the year 70 C.E. There was then a need to

transform the words of Jesus that they remembered, and the experience of or with Jesus that they had known, into written records. This is how the Gospels came into written form. It was 35 to 70 years after Jesus died that his memory was put into writing. Do you remember in fine detail words that were spoken to you twenty years ago? Each Gospel writer had to write the words as his faith community remembered them. Matthew wrote in 82 – 85 C.E and copied 90 percent of Mark into his Gospel. Luke wrote in 88 - 93 C.E and copied 50 percent of Mark into his Gospel. The all used their own *midrashic* interpretations to make the Gospels Christian versions of Old Testament stories like Noah's destruction, Abraham's giving of his "only begotten son", blood sacrifices, Israel's journey from Egypt, Blood protection, etc to create New Testament versions of Old Testament stories. This is the reason why even Western people can talk about being "washed in the blood" and "drinking the blood" even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The book of Revelation, which has today become the premier piece of apocalyptic literature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – just like it was in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, falls in the same if not worst league with other post 70 writings. "Revelation is widely popular for the wrong reasons," said biblical scholar Raymond Brown. This is one book that gets quoted quite frequently with a strange literalness by fundamentalists who specialize in producing sufficient fear amongst Christians. A substantial number of fundamentalist preachers read the book of Revelation as forecasting the imminent "end of the world" and the *Second Coming of Christ*. I have already mentioned in the previous chapter how doomsday preachers use dates like 100 C.E, 1000 C.E, 2000 C.E or any strange form of numerology like 9/11, 7/7 to create fear. Historians tell us that Jesus was born somewhere between 8 B.C.E and 4 B.C.E – that is; if He was born during Herod's reign as the Bible claims. Herod died in 4 B.C.E. This will then mean that we entered the third millennium 4 to 8 years before the year 2000 and no one noticed.

Many Christians are not aware that the book of Revelation has been controversial from Christian antiquity to the present day. This book was only included in Greek manuscripts of the New Testament in the eleventh century. Leaders of the Protestant Reformation had their own doubts about the book of Revelation. Martin Luther included it in the New Testament only reluctantly and gave it

secondary stature. He even wished it would be thrown into the Elbe River, according to scholar, Marcus Borg. Borg further states that, “*Ulrich Zwingli denied it scriptural status; and John Calvin largely ignored it (writing commentaries on the other twenty-six books of the New Testament but not on Revelation).*” The book of Revelation itself indicates that John was thinking of his own time. On several occasions John tells his audience that he is writing about the near future. His first sentence begins, “*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.*” Two verses later, he says, “*Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.*” Just in this epilogue alone, the emphasis on nearness occurs five times. Three times the author attributes to the Christ the written words, “I am coming soon.” Christians in subsequent centuries, until this day, have often sought to avoid the implications of “soon” and “near” by saying that God’s time is not our time. This was not the way the original hearers of the generation John wrote to heard him. They did not hear the language of “soon” with the qualifications our twenty first century interpreters’ qualification and Biblical spin. There is compelling evidence in the main body of the book that John was writing about realities of his own day. The evidence is most visible in chapters thirteen to seventeen. Scholars have decoded 666, with the rules of *gematria*, into Caesar Nero. Babylon has become a symbolic name for Rome. If John was writing about events thousands of years in the future, then the communities to which he wrote had no chance of understanding his letter. Martin Luther, living in the sixteenth century, had no chance of understanding his letter. There is nothing linking the book of Revelation to the European Economic Community as our latter-day doomsday prophets predict. If the giant locusts refer to some future army of two hundred million people, then the message of Revelation had no significance to the people who were told of things that would happen soon, and in their generation. Throughout the Bible, God’s dream is a dream for this earth, and not for another world. For John, the writer of Revelation, it is the only dream worth dreaming. Let us not forget that this was just a dream. A gothic nightmare for old John; It still haunts us.

## **A 2000 year old Second Coming delusion**

As I was doing final touches on this book our world was going through “untold” anguish. Citizens of planet Earth were experiencing floods, tsunamis, mudslides, droughts, hurricanes typhoons, plus a pandemic of prophecies predicting the end of the world very soon. Cataclysmic, ecological, climatic, and global events were devastating humankind. Two big earthquakes, one in Haiti and one in Chile had just paralysed us. There were others in Turkey, Japan, California, and tornados in Australia, Uganda, etc. I received several emails and sms’s suggesting that I was wrong as the world was moving towards an apocalypse. The world’s apocalyptic and Armageddonists who regard these spate natural disasters as omens of what they call The End of The World as We Know It (TEOTWAKI), were having a time of their lives. They all disregard or are ignorant of the five thousand year history of doom-sayers’ predictions that never came true. They also disregard the fact that almost seven billion of us are still here tells us something about the quality of their forecasting skills. Some stick to their devotional understanding of the Bible and ignore and attack the historical-scientific method. Apocalypse itself; is a word that has now lost its original meaning. The word simply means revelation. It was the aged writer of the book of Revelation who turned the word apocalypse (revelation) into such a gothic and horror filled word. I have been referring my critics to science (knowledge) for some therapy from the anxieties that were depressing them. Consider the following from the internet:

- Between 1900 and 2000; one billion five hundred thousand people (1.5 billion) were killed by fifteen big earthquakes.
- Between 1900 and 2000; one billion two hundred people (1.2 billion) were killed in cataclysmic and climatic events.
- In 1247 – 1250; 80 million Europeans were killed by the Black Death (bubonic plague) pandemic in Europe.
- 200 million people were killed in wars over the past century alone.

- 100 million people were killed in the European Revolutions between 1700 and 1900.
- Millions more were killed in civil wars and criminal activity, brotherly conflicts (Cain and Abel wars), etc.

Christians have however spent the last 2000 years guessing at the season, the year, and the very date of the Second Coming. They disregard the fact that the apostle Paul and other apostles expected the imminent return of Christ during their generation. They disregard the fact that Mathew 24 was written for the generation that Jesus lived in and also says that same “*generation will not pass away.*” They neglect or do not know that Mathew was actually written after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, where “*no stone was left unturned*” (Matt. 24:34). Modern prophecy preachers imply that Paul and the apostles did not understand the scriptures as well as they do, and that Jesus could not have returned in the first century. They claim that the events of the 20th and 21st centuries are prerequisites for the Second Coming. Modern prophecy preachers, like Jack van Impe, use the Bible and current news events to inflate current happenings in the world with a prophetic significance that is utterly unbiblical. Many Christians are not even aware that the most widely preached interpretation of the Second Coming is an eschatology that was formulated only in 1850 by a man called John Darby. He named it the theology of Dispensationalism.

The end times according to Darby’s Dispensationalism predict that there will come a moment when Christians (the chosen) will instantaneously and simultaneously disappear from the earth and meet with Jesus somewhere high above the earth. This Second Coming will involve the destruction horrendous proportions. Darby predicted this before anyone knew that there will be a day when there will be fifty thousand aeroplanes flying thousands of people at any given time. It was long before anyone knew that at any given time there are ten million cars on the road. Some modern day prophets still preach a Second Coming that will involve killings and destruction of horrendous proportions. This mammoth destruction that takes place at “Rapture” will be followed by seven years of suffering for those who did not die horrible deaths when thousands of planes and millions of cars cause untold mayhem in the world. Darby labelled these seven horrific years “The Great Tribulation”. After this there will be more

and worse suffering called Armageddon. After Armageddon there will be more horrendous suffering in the form of a lake of fire for eternal, conscious damnation. A third of the human population will be killed (that is 2.5 billion people!). This is a dangerous and immoral theology of The Second Coming. No wonder Brian McLaren says in *Everything Must Change*:

...this eschatological understanding of a violent Second Coming leads us to believe that in the end, even God finds it impossible to fix the world apart from violence and coercion; no one should be surprised when those shaped by this theology behave accordingly.

The Second Coming need not be a gothic threat. It need not be nightmare but a promise. The Second Coming was given to us in order for us to have hope. It should be good news for all those who have joined with God to struggle against the evils in the world. It is an assurance that our labour is not in vain, one day peace will reign. The Second Coming should bring us hope that the hungry will be fed, the naked clothed, and the homeless housed. It is a promise and expectation that God will create a new heaven and a new earth. It is a promise that the earth will not hurt any more. It has still not occurred to many Christians that when Jesus promised the *Second Coming* he was not talking about his mythological return from heaven (thought to be above the skies), but rather of the second coming of God who is present in each of us. It is the same God who is present in us who comes again into our world in us and through us. Can we dare to embrace the possibility that we ourselves are the second coming of Christ? The Jews missed the first coming of Christ. Are Christians missing the second coming of Christ same way Jews missed the first coming? There is a Second Coming that is not delusional and hopeless. There is a Second Coming that is not destructive but constructive. To that true Second Coming, we now turn.

## Chapter 6 - The True Second Coming

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### **The coming global spirituality**

I have to repeat that God is not a person or a being sitting on a throne beyond the skies. God is not a literal “Father” either. God is not a supersized parent. God is the ground of being and a part of who I am. God is not external to me. God is the wonder, awe, and mystery that have been with me even before I was born. God is the mystery of connectivity that has been a part of my journey. Some people have different name for this awe and wonder of life. I call it Christ. I have to go deep within me, within my brain, to discover God. Scientists have proved to us in so many ways that God is an “idea” embedded deep inside our brains. We are wired for God at birth. Atheists seem to be wired for God more than believers because they think and talk about God more than believers. They are correct to assert that God does not exist. This is the reason they are called atheists. Atheism is rightly defined as a belief that there is no theistic God. There is no God beyond the skies. Atheists rightly reject the God that is proclaimed by the great majority of believers. Atheism is not a denial of the sacred but a denial of a certain conception of God. Into this understanding we bring Jesus Christ.

The evolutionary journey of understanding God has been a very long one for humanity. We today, through the life of Jesus, see the human family as one. We have travelled a long God- journey to get here. Coming from a multi, spirit-filled, animistic world, first to identifying God with nature’s cycles of fertility, then to the warrior’s deities of tribal life, then to a God made in the image of earthly Kings. Our journey has moved from; a God who hated Egyptians so much that he sent multiple plagues on them and closed the Red Sea so that the Egyptians drown, a God of the desert who sends snakes to bite his people because they murmured against him, a God who hated the Amorites so much that he “stopped the sun” in the sky to allow more

daylight for Joshua and his army to slaughter the whole nation, a God of Noah, who killed billions and billions of animals, birds, and fish because of the sin of human beings; a God of David, who decimated a people, because their King took a census of his empire. A God who used to be spoken of as “existing” above the skies; a God who used to “visit” the garden of Eden has been taken away from us and destroyed by both the march of time and the explosion of knowledge. This monotheistic God has now become “homeless” and “unemployed”, to use the words of English scholar, Professor Michael Goulder. This is the God of fundamentalists, a too familiar God; a God who can be known by a mere human being. Theologians have named this a cathapathic theology as opposed to apophathic theology.

The Judeo-Christian Bible and the Koran are replete with stories that portray their monotheistic God as anything but kind, loving, just or generous. These sacred texts, in many places, portray a monotheistic God who can scarcely be described in any way than American atheist, Michael Earl describes him:

If we want to know why people kill in the name of God, and why they have been doing so for thousands of years, we must face one simple and obvious fact that almost nobody wants to confront. The fact is this: the God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – the God of monotheism – is a terrorist. In fact, he’s the ultimate terrorist. It is an undeniable fact that the God described in the pages of the Holy Bible and Holy Koran is a blood-thirsty, ruthless, destructive terrorist.

This is not mere hyperbole on my part; it is an easily verifiable fact. By every definition of the word terrorist, God qualifies. For example, the U.S Department of Defence defines terrorism as “*the calculated use of violence or threat of violence to include fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological.*”

When we look at an event like the conquest of Canaan, the huge massacres of millions of women and children, we must not lose sight of the fact that these actions were carried out in response to orders from God. The Bible makes that absolutely clear. When we read the brutal Law of Moses,

where people's brains are being bashed in with rocks for breaking the Sabbath, for having sex with wrong people, for believing in wrong things: all of these atrocious laws can be traced back to God. And when we read in scripture about hell, about billions being tortured in fire for all eternity – this is God who is orchestrating all of this.

God, by any stretch of the imagination, is a terrorist. God employs the calculated use of violence or threat of violence to include fear – and he does it for religious reasons. In anybody's book, that's terrorism.

The violence of the Old Testament has always been a scandal to Christianity. Biblical scholar Raymond Schwager points out that there are six hundred passages of explicit violence in the Hebrew Bible, one thousand verses where God's own violent actions of punishment are described, a hundred passages where Yahweh expressly commands others to kill people, and several stories where God irrationally kills or tries to kill for no apparent reason. For example, why did God try to kill Moses because He was not circumcised (Exod. 4:24-26)? How did God know Moses was not circumcised? Did God tell Moses to undress and did an inspection on his genitals. These false ideas about God are still continuing even today. Listen to American Christians on gospel TV thanking God for saving their soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. When I hear preachers thanking God that only a few soldiers died and the majority were preserved, I ask; what about the thousands of innocent civilians killed in both countries; children of a lesser God? In the Hebrew Bible, God's alleged punishments are usually carried out by human beings attacking each other. This indicates that the actual initiative for killing does not originate with God, but is projected onto God by those who desire revenge. They projected their own jealousy on God and made God as jealous as they were. There is a difference between, "God said," and "The Bible writer said, 'God said'."

Evolutionary and postmodern theology of God offers us a less vindictive and far more venerable understanding of God than the one portrayed in the Bible and the Koran. It also offers us a better understanding of human suffering than the ones offered by the Bible. The Bible has failed dismally to explain human suffering. We now have to go to evolutionary science to understand human suffering. It is from evolutionary science where we develop a new theology on

human suffering. Human suffering is part of our evolutionary transition out of the world we are living in currently to a new world that emerges now and then. We are creating a new heaven and earth for the coming generations. The previous generations created the heaven and earth we inhabit today, they did that without our modern industrial technology. Suffering is very real, but also, suffering is much more less than it was before the advent of industrial technology after the first Reformation. The next generations will suffer also, their suffering will be “lighter” than the suffering we are enduring now, comparatively speaking. Suffering is a given in this life. The Buddha declared five hundred years before the birth of Christ that, “Life is suffering”. Jesus came and became a model on how we should endure and deal with suffering. Simone Weil, a twentieth century mystic said, *“The false God changes suffering into violence, the true God changes violence into suffering.”*

## **Embracing God as pure spirit**

Jesus Christ is not a person. The historical Jesus who walked the streets of Galilee was a person. Christ lived inside this person. Who is then Christ? The first century believers experienced Christ as a spirit person. We can demonstrate that the very first references to him include an abundant use of the word spirit. This is a very fascinating word. It reflects the limitations found in all human vocabulary. Spirit is nebulous, hard to define, and totally subjective. I will use a few definitions from the Bible as the word was applied by first century Christians. St. Paul, talks about Jesus, who came, “in power and in the holy spirit” (1 Thess. 1:5). He inspired joy (1 Thess. 1:6). Through this Jesus, God has given the holy spirit to you (1 Thess. 4:8). He further urged believers to be careful lest they “quench the spirit” (1 Thess. 5:19). Paul, further urged the Jesus people to “walk by the spirit” (Gal. 5:16). He described the fruit of the spirit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and even faith (Gal. 5:22). Think about it! Faith! This was long before faith was interpreted as belief; long before Christianity evolved as a system of beliefs. Faith is a manifestation of the presence of the spirit. I call myself a person of faith. I’m no longer a person of beliefs. This is what Christianity is regaining in this New Reformation.

Later, when Paul began to write to the Corinthians, he carried the spirit language to new levels. The spirit searches everything, he said, even the deep things or “the depths of God” (1 Cor. 2:10). Spirit was the depth

dimension of human life, and even more, spirit was the depth dimension of God's divine life, Paul argued. It is a breathtaking concept! The same spirit, which is of God, is also within us. Paul is actually suggesting that a unity already exists between God and human life and this unity is located in the depth of the human experience. When we human beings are united with God we become "one spirit with him" (1Cor. 6:17). Paul, then declared that our human bodies are "the temple of the holy spirit" (1 Cor. 6:19). This was long before the story of Pentecost was written in the ninth century. It was also long before the fabrication of the Trinity doctrine in the second century. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity was an attempt to resolve the problem of how Jesus was related to God by declaring him to be the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity. For the next three hundred years, council after council sat; trying to explain how human nature and divine nature could be united in the one historical person. Scholars have traced the stages through which Jesus has progressed in Christian thought: Messiah (Christ), a Son of God, the Logos or Word of God and creator of the world, the incarnation of God, and finally the second person of the Holy Trinity as defined in the creeds. After almost two thousand years of this complex structure of doctrine, the structure has now collapsed under its own weight. We now have to define a Christology of Jesus for the twenty first century person. This is what The Second Coming of Christ is all about. We have to deconstruct this great figure of history, called Jesus Christ – to use post-modern language.

I move on to the Jewish vocabulary, where I pick up the Jewish word for wind, *ruach*, and the Jewish word for breath, *nephesh*. When we explore the deeper meaning of these words, we discover that they both were conceived to be mysterious in both their origin and their destination. The *Spirit* "blows where it wills and you hear the sound of it, but you do not whence it comes or whither it goes," said John (3:8). The Gospel writer went on to say, "So is everyone born of the spirit." In the mythical Jewish story of creation, God created life in the man, Adam, when God "breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life and this creature became a living being" (Gen. 2:7). The mighty wind, the *ruach*, was understood to be the very breath of God. God's breath, or the divine *nephesh*, came to be thought of as the very source of all life, and *nephesh* or breath was identified with the vitality and animation found in every living being. In Jewish thinking, *spirit* was conceived of externally as the wind, the *ruach*, and internally as the breath of life itself, the *nephesh*. When *nephesh* was removed from a human being or any other being; that being became inert and dead. *Nephesh* was later translated as "soul" or "spirit".

At its inception and at its heart, it referred to the breath of God dwelling within us, calling us to life itself. Brain scientists like Mathew Alper have flawlessly argued that our concepts of spirit and God are derived from the mechanics of our brain. Human beings evolved with a belief in a transcendent power wired in their brains. Our God consciousness, or Christ consciousness if you will, is embedded in our brain functions. It was Ludwig Feuerbach (1804 – 1872) who first conceded that the mind or the spirit is the highest and noblest aspect of humanity, giving rise to ideas, thoughts, science, philosophy, and even religion. He associated the human spirit with the mind and the mind with the activity of the brain. We, today, know the importance of both our right brain and left brain in being wholly human beings. This view is quite consistent with the growing appreciation of the psychosomatic condition of all human beings.

I therefore now conceive of Jesus as a spirit person, a God presence. This becomes my point of entry into his meaning. I go beyond the boundary of a God who lives beyond the skies. I discover the startling revelation of God at the centre of human life, and Jesus, the spirit person, stands at the centre of that revelation. I see Jesus as a God bearer. I then go on to call Jesus my God. Human self-consciousness is no longer thought of as something apart from God or Ultimate Reality. I see the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the resurrection of the God presence within me. I see the emerging global spirituality as the emergence of the Christ within all human beings. I no longer see Christ as a tribal figure who came for a chosen few but as Messiah who died for all humanity and saved all humanity whether they know it or not, whether they accept this or not. I see Christ being resurrected again, years after we tried to bury him under our creeds and church traditions. I see Christ rising above our church traditions and belief systems that we have been raised under.

What followed the death of Jesus was his resurrection. Again, this has been interpreted as a physical resurrection for the past two thousand years. It was only in the past two hundred years or so that the resurrection stories were treated as symbols. The God who came to life again in the resurrection of Christ was the *spirit, ruach, nephesh*, which came upon the followers of Jesus after his death. The Christ figure symbolized the fact that God had become one with mankind – God was made man! God has become incarnate in the world, embodying himself at the centre of history and life. God who was first conceived as YHWH by our ancient fathers, then called “Father” by Jesus; this God – had now become man.

The life and death of Jesus Christ marked a turning point in human history. There is still reluctance on the part of the Christian church to see any connection between Christianity and the modern secular world. Many pastors totally dismiss the fact that the person of Jesus Christ could be found in other religions, including the New Age movement. As theologian, Tom Driver has said:

Christianity has been compelled to see itself as a religion *relative* to other religions and relative to the history of the world. Christianity does this reluctantly...The gap between Christianity and modern theories of relativity is widening so much that the church's teaching about Christ is in danger of losing both its intellectual and its moral credibility. To think of Christ as the centre, model and norm of humanity made a certain sense in the Ptolemaic universe, which had the Earth as its centre. It continued to make sense, however strained, in the Copernican universe, which had the sun as its centre. Today, Christocentrism cannot make sense in the Einsteinium universe, which has no centre and which every structure is a dynamic rationality of moving parts...The ethical theological task of the churches today is to find a Christology which can be liberating in a world of relativity.

Some have argued that Christianity without the theistic God – a God above the skies – is no longer Christianity but humanism. The word 'humanism' is disliked in evangelical Christian circles. This is what the New Age movement has been accused of. I need to clarify its meaning. The term 'humanism' originated during the Renaissance and basically refers to all philosophies and sets of attitudes which acknowledge positive value in the human condition and which concede to humankind the right to be free, to think for itself, and to be responsible for its own destiny. The opposite of humanism is inhumane. Whether one prefers to use the term 'humanistic Christianity', 'non-theistic Christianity', or simply 'post-Christian' is a matter of personal choice. The fact remains, that Christianity will never be the same after this current reformation. It will definitely shed its tribal worldview. Christian universalism is on the march. Until the period known as the Enlightenment, human freedom was regarded in the Christian world as a dangerous phenomenon, an open door to civil unrest, rebellion, and social chaos. It was firmly believed that people were not meant to be free; rather they were created to be subject to authority – subject to God the Supreme Ruler, subject to the King (who

ruled under God) and finally, subject to the position in life that God had allotted them. People were not even meant to be free to have their own thoughts, to say nothing of the lack to express them in speech. People were expected to think the thoughts prescribed by God through the Bible, thoughts that would win God's approval. It was Picodella Mirandola (1463 – 1494) in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, who told us that, “the reason why God made man at the close of creation was in order that we might come to the laws of the universe, to love its beauty, and to admire its greatness.” He suggested that God told Adam that he had created him to be neither heavenly nor earthly but to be free to shape himself into whatever form he chose and to bear responsibility for the consequences of his decisions.

This is what was taken away from human beings by traditional Christianity with its emphasis on the consequences of “The Fall” and its dogmas of “Original Sin”. We live today, however, on the other side of Charles Darwin, whose thought has destroyed most of traditional Christianity's presuppositions. For Darwin there never was a perfect creation. Life rather evolved over billions of years from a single cell into self-conscious complexity. Without original perfection there could have been no human fall into sin. If there was no human fall, there was no need for a divine rescue. No one can be rescued from a fall that never happened or be restored to a status one has never possessed. We are in evolution, evolving into something we do not know. Like mythical Abraham, called to leave the gods he was accustomed to, we are being called to leave our tribal idols, to unknown and uncharted territories. We are called into the road less travelled by.

## **The resurrection of the Christ within**

The *Christ within* and *The Cosmic Christ* are one and the same. I will use the terms interchangeably. I will focus more on *The Christ within* and less on *The Cosmic Christ*. Both terms denote the immanence and the transcendence of God. For the purpose of this book I will put more emphasis on the immanence of God. This is the area where we struggle the most with our spirituality. In my previous book, *Thinking about – God – Talking about*, I promised my readers a book on *The Second Coming of Christ*. In the beginning of February 2010 I was already deep into writing this book when I discovered that a book by a New Age guru, Paramahansa Yogananda (1893 – 1952), had just been released in late

January 2010. The title of the book, amazingly, is *The Second Coming of Christ – The Resurrection of the Christ within you*. I was elated beyond myself with excitement. It was a definite confirmation that something is definitely happening in the world of the spirit. In this unprecedented masterwork of inspiration, Yogananda takes us on a profoundly enriching journey through the four Gospels. Verse by verse, he illuminates the universal path to oneness with God taught by Jesus to his immediate disciples. He confirmed what I had already written in my previous chapters, that the person of Jesus Christ has been obscured through centuries of misinterpretation. The book's contents, transcends divisive sectarianism and tribalism to reveal a unifying harmony underlying all true religions of the world. It is a groundbreaking synthesis of East and West. It imparts the life-transforming realization that each of us can experience for ourselves the promised Second Coming – awakening the Divine Consciousness latent within our souls. We have entered the post-Christian world, also described as the secular world. By the term "secular" I do not mean non-religious. It means "this worldly" or "this age". Professor Harvey Cox, in his book, *The Secular City*, defines secularization simply as "*man turning his attention away from worlds beyond and toward this world and this time.*"

*"It may seem bizarre, but in my opinion, science offers a surer path to God than religion,"* said Paul Davies. Christianity is going through unprecedented change. There is, however, a relationship between Christianity and the emerging, global post-Christian world. I operate in the nexus of technology and spirituality. We just have to look at the world of technology to see how the post-Christian world will look like. We do not have a Moslem, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Christian, or any religion's technology. So it is with the banking system, financial markets, or any other worldview. In the spiritual world, the whole of humanity is being drawn into one global form of human existence. We human beings, the world over, are becoming increasingly interdependent on one global economy, even though this is making some very rich and some very poor. More than ever before we human beings face a common future and for this we must create some kind of global culture. We no longer look far when we talk about Hindus, Moslems, Buddhists, atheists, etc. They are our neighbours, our doctors, our dentists, or business partners. We have to learn to love our neighbours as we love ourselves. Christianity no longer determines the public face of western societies. Moreover, there has never been a time when all who confessed to be Christians shared all the same

beliefs. We have now come to the end of a Christianity of beliefs. As we look back at where we come from, we can discern phases in the ongoing life of the Christian stream.

We have evolved from mediaeval Christendom, the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, to the current global spiritual revival. At the beginning of the Christian era, this vision of a global spiritual revival passed from Jews to Christians. Judaism retreated to its tribal shell, somewhat shocked by what it had brought forth. As we begin the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we discover the Christian vision for a global revival remaining as tribal as the Jewish one was in the first century. The Jews missed the first coming of Christ. Are Christians missing the second coming of Christ same way Jews missed the first coming? Someone observed that first century Christians went out preaching the coming of the Kingdom but what actually arrived was the Church. For the past two thousand years we went out to create a global Christendom out of the nations of the world but what has actually arrived is a global secular world. This global secular world has brought human rights and the value of personal freedom. Freedom from absolute rule by the monarchy, freedom from slavery, freedom from racism, freedom for women, freedom for homosexuals, etc, came with secular Christianity. The global secular world is far from ideal and is still criticized. It is a world in which much is still going wrong. It is a world where we still have to make a lot of difficult choices about our own future and the future of the planet.

## **Who is Christ?**

Maybe the relevant question is; who is Jesus to me. Each and every one of us should have our own self-revelation of Christ. This is a two thousand year old question. We, individually have to answer the question, “Who do you say I am?” (Matt. 16:15). Who do I say Jesus is? What think ye of Jesus? Jesus is for me, the light that shines in the darkness. This is the revelation that has led me to write this book. The next question will be, “what does this light mean to other faith traditions?” Can we as Christians have monopoly on this light? Do we have the copyright on this light? What if this definition of Jesus as light, was the only one available? How would we see other religions? Do other faith traditions have this light? Even if they use other names to name it? How about knowing Jesus as wisdom? Within the Eastern religions, the two best-known teachers of wisdom are Lao-tzu and the Buddha. Lao-tzu spoke of following a “way” that led away from conventional perceptions and values and toward living

with “the Tao” itself. At the centre of the Buddha’s teaching is the image of a way, “the eightfold path,” leading to enlightenment and compassion. The wisdom of all Eastern religions is the wisdom of “the road less travelled.” Jesus, who lived more than five hundred years after the Buddha and Lao-Tzu, spoke of “the narrow way,” which led to life, and subverted the “broad way” followed by many, which led to destruction. No one can study the teachings of the Buddha, Lao-tzu, Muhammad, and other faith sages and not feel that they are actually referring to the same light, same wisdom, same way, same gate, same bread, etc, unless, of course, we have made our minds that these religions are false and do not even deserve our attention.

In many faith traditions around the world, the term “I am” is used for the divine. Hindus teach that the eternal Godhead, Brahman, is known through human consciousness as Atman This spirituality is light years beyond Descartes’ dictum, “I think therefore I am.” I am because everything else is. I am in everything and everything is in me. Scientist have shown us that inside of our bodies we carry 16 billion year old molecules. Thank God for the gospel of John. We now know that the incarnation accomplished the following: God became human and human beings became God and sharers in the divine nature.

The ancient mystics explained it to us:

That which is not expressed by speech,  
but that by which speech is expressed:  
know that to be God, not what people here adore.

That which is not thought by the mind,  
but that by which the mind thinks:  
know that to be God, not what people here adore.

That which is not seen by the eye,  
but that by which the eye sees:  
know that to be God, not what people here adore.

That which is not heard by the ear,  
but that by which the ear hears:  
know that to be God, not what people here adore.

That which is not breathed by the breath,  
but that by which the breath breathes:  
know that to be God, not what people here adore.

## Wisdom from the Kena Upanishad

There the eye does not go, nor speech, nor the mind.  
We do not know, we do not understand  
how one can teach this.

Different, indeed, is it from the known,  
and also it is above the unknown.  
Thus have we heard from the ancients who explained it to us.

That which is not expressed by speech,  
but that by which speech is expressed:  
know that to be God, not what people here adore.

That which is not thought by the mind,  
but that by which the mind thinks:  
know that to be God, not what people here adore.

That which is not seen by the eye,  
but that by which the eye sees:  
know that to be God, not what people here adore.

That which is not heard by the ear,  
but that by which the ear hears:  
know that to be God, not what people here adore.

That which is not breathed by the breath,  
but that by which the breath breathes:  
know that to be God, not what people here adore.

What's interesting for me is that the Upanishads come out of the Hindu mystic tradition, and it is in the various mystic traditions where we start seeing this kind of language merging in that it's not so much driven by a dogma or belief, but rather an experience of transcendence.

So you see this emerging in the writings of the Christian mystics as well as the mystics of many other traditions.

## Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh has said:

From a Buddhist perspective, who is not the son of God? When we are in touch with the highest spirit in ourselves, we too are Buddha, filled with the Holy Spirit, and we become very

tolerant, very open, very deep, and very understanding. We do not have to die to arrive at the gates of Heaven. In fact, we have to be truly alive. A Buddha is someone who is awake. Our present home is in the present moment. The miracle is not to walk on water. The miracle is to walk on the green earth in the present moment.

The Christ consciousness is the projected consciousness of God immanent in all creation; the cosmic intelligence of the Spirit everywhere. Human beings, through this divine consciousness, created the world we live in. We created our world; the aeroplanes, the space ships, the cruise ships, cell phones, technology, TV's, etc. This was all created by us over the past five hundred years. The cosmic intelligence of Spirit is everywhere. We feel this consciousness as one with God in deep meditation, prayer, contemplation and even in our secular lives.

*The Second Coming of Christ* is about a global spiritual awakening sweeping the whole world right. It is about the return of God – not as a God living beyond the skies, but as God who is one with us and we are one with him. It is about reclaiming the Christianity that was lost when our faith tradition was twisted around to meet the needs of the rulers of the Roman Empire, when Constantine took over Christianity and turned it into a religion. When I talk about *The Second Coming of Christ*, I am not referring to a literal return of Jesus Christ to earth. There is no more reason to believe in a literal person coming out of the skies in our new scientific cosmology. There are no literal skies that are going to break apart for a literal person to come from the skies. That ancient understanding of the cosmos is no more. Our new cosmos is a tilting globe without any heaven beyond the skies. If we do not locate heaven we may have to think of our ever expanding universe and even think in terms of billions of years from today. *The Second Coming of Christ* is about the coming of the cosmic wisdom and divine perception of Jesus to speak again through each one's experience and understanding of the infinite Christ consciousness that was incarnate in Jesus. It is about the New Christianity, Christianity without beliefs. A new path of the spirit; Christ is coming into our consciousness as health, prosperity, and the perception and fulfilment of all our hopes in the divine consciousness. He is coming to help us find ourselves again through human relationships. He is quoted by John saying, "I came that they might have life, and have life abundantly" (John 10:10). Over the coming years, we will find Christ to be omnipresent in the human consciousness. There is no place, where we

will not encounter Christ. We are going to encounter Christ even amongst atheists. We will encounter Christ amongst the most unlikely of people. Christ will come into our world for the second time; bringing us infinite bliss, infinite wisdom, infinite joy. Like He was born in a manger, he will be born in the cradle of our hearts. He will come as the aspect of the Godhead that creates and sustains all things. He is coming a second time – to you – to be established in your consciousness forever. The resurrection of Christ and the newness of life in Christ can be experienced within you now.

Before I discuss the Cosmic Christ from the perspective of Biblical scripture, I will first quote from a very eminent Hindu scholar who lived more than fifty years ago. Here's what Paramahansa Yogananda had to say:

In scriptural parlance characteristic of India's sages, Saint John in the several opening verses of his Gospel posits, in a *double entendre* reference to the incarnation of Jesus, the divinity of the Christ state of Jesus as analogous to the Universal Christ manifestation of God that comes forth as Intelligence and Creative Vibration at the birth of creation. Devotees in India make no differentiation between the divinity of God in the microcosm of the incarnate consciousness of an avatar – as in Lord Krishna, for example – and the divinity of God in the macrocosm of universal expression. Likewise, Saint John speaks allegorically of the Christ in Jesus as one and the same as the Christ manifestation in Infinitude (the presence of God in creation), the latter being the intent of his presentation in these verses.

## Chapter 7 - Biblical Panentheism

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### The “Everywhere-ness” of God—God in all things

I was raised in a worldview that told me *Christ* was owned by Christians and Christians only. It was a worldview that taught me that my Christianity was the absolute religion. If God could be known, He could only be known through the one true religion (which just happened to be my Christian one). I was told that this Christ could only be known through this one Christian religion. My worldview transformed as my spiritual path took me to countries that, I only heard Christian evangelists call “fields that are ripe for harvest.” It was after travelling to these countries and meeting this Jesus Christ, the one I call **My Lord**, amongst Buddhist, Hindus, Shinto, Moslems, etc. The lens through which I saw reality changed. My view changed. My beliefs changed. The belief that Christianity was the only way to salvation, and the claim that Jesus (as I understood him) was the only way, became very troubling for me. I quit believing that Christianity was the “absolute” religion. I could not live in denial. I could not deny; the attraction I saw in the non-theistic and more humanistic character of the Buddhist tradition in Bangkok; the deep mystical spirituality of the Hindu tradition in India; the more physical practice of spirituality found in the Chinese tradition; the warm and attractive Shinto philosophy of the Japanese, etc. I did not only end by admiring these great spiritual traditions, I also bought their holy books and began reading them myself. It was in reading the holy books of other religions that I discovered that we are talking about the same reality; we are just using a different worldview. We are talking about the same light using a different language; talking about the same wisdom, just expressing it differently. I am not going to dig deeper into the texts of other religions for the purpose of this book. This book is mainly written to Christians. I will now dig into our Christian Bible to prove the reality I am talking about.

Christ is found in all religions. Christ is for all religions. We Christians should actually offer Jesus (not a tribal Christianity) as a gift to the world. We can then find other religions as our neighbours and treat them like neighbours. We can stop trying to find logs, faults, and demons inside them and instead look for logs, faults, and demons inside our own religion (Matt. 7:4-5). We will treat them the way we want them to treat us. We will stop calling them Pagans, ungodly, gentiles, un-redeemed, and all the names we use to call the other. We will no longer consider it a requirement of faithfulness to insult other religions and call their founders demonic. We will no longer envision a day when all other religions would be abolished and only our own would remain. We will no longer see the line that separates good and evil running between our religion and others. We will be freed from the tendency to call other religions “*them,*” *outsiders,*” and discover a bigger “*us*” in which all people and all faiths are included in Jesus Christ. Jesus died for all. God is not holding the sins of humanity against them – not just the sins of Christians. God was in Christ – reconciling the world, not just Christians (2 Cor. 5:14-19). Christianity as a religion of the tribe is no more. Just like Judaism as a religion of the tribe has died, Christianity is dying as a religion of the chosen generation. Jesus Christ is no longer a tribal chief. Our first responsibility as followers of Jesus is to treat people of other religions with the same respect we would want to receive from them. Let us share each other’s faith experiences, our spiritual paths, the manner in which Jesus has walked with us, even when we did not know it was Jesus, even when we called this Jesus in different names. Even when we called this Jesus; our ancestors, the Buddha nature, Muhammad, Krishna, or whatever name we used. He walked with us nevertheless. He is not married to dogma. He is not married to beliefs. He is married to common humanity.

I have become a postmodern mystic. I have said this on several occasions already. One of the wildest aspects of mystical Christian thought lies in the simple truth that God is everywhere. And if God is in fact everywhere, then God is in all things, and all things are in God. As mystical theologian, Matthew Fox writes: “*As the ocean is in the fish and the fish are in God, so God is in everything and everything is in God.*” Theologians call this Biblical position “panENtheism,” meaning literally, “everything is in God and God in everything” (*pan*, everything; *en*, in; *theos*, God). Panentheism suggests that God is experienced in and through all things, but tries to distinguish itself

from the claims made by Pantheism that God is identical with all things. Panentheism was designed to assert "the beyond" nature of the transcendent. Spirit is at the heart of everything, and all creatures are potential revealers of God. Panentheism is distinguished from pantheism, which maintains that God is all, and all is God. *Panentheism* is not yet in most dictionaries, but with Google listing over 10 000 pages with the word, perhaps it's time has come! I had a meeting with a Minister who drew huge dictionaries, encyclopedia, and concordances from his library to search for the word. I searched it in a minute using Google on my blackberry. I however, prefer to talk of God as being beyond theism. I do not think that human beings should ever try to define God. *Panentheism* is one more human attempt at an explanation. I am not drawn to any words that purport to define God. I am deeply drawn to God. I am content to experience the reality I call God. I do not worry about defining the reality. Theism, Pantheism, Panentheism are just words I use to define the un-define-able.

## **Panentheism and the Wonder of God**

Since the scientific revolution of the fifteenth century as I discussed it previously, there has been an increasing tendency in Christianity to see God as separate from Creation. To the common view, it's no longer God sending the sun across the sky each day, but the Earth's rotation, and no longer God raining down blessings on our fields, but water precipitation. Of course, we might pray for God to step in and cause some precipitation, but prevalent thinking has him obsessed with "spiritual" concerns, and uninvolved with the universe. *In my opinion, this is nothing but the utter negligence of the modern Christian mind to seek God where he may be found!* This has led to a wholly unnecessary gulf between science and religion, and results in a tragic compartmentalization of our "spiritual life" as being somehow separate from our daily lives. According to this thought, God is fundamentally uninvolved. The universe is like a wind-up toy, left to go on its own, while God attends to – whatever as a response per our prayer invitation. Once formed, natural laws work without any continued intelligence or consciousness, the true mindless governors of an inert and dumb universe.

But the truth is that science itself is shedding that view. Science invites believers of all faiths to question: *Who? What? Why?* Who sustains our continued survival through precipitation on our fields? What does the constant rotation of the Earth on its axis *mean* to those of us who depend on it for life? *What* is the source of the Big Bang, Evolution, or First Cause? *Why* are we here? For Christians, the answer is as simple as it is profound: *God*. The vibrant message from the Bible, from Christian mystics, and lately even science, is quite different. The Bible says, "The heavens are alive, declaring the glory of God" (Ps. 19), and that Christ is the One who "holds all things together," (Col. 1.17). Ever since the double-slit experiment which proved that even individual photons of light have awareness, even science recognizes that consciousness permeates the universe at the subatomic level. And a universe where, not just plants, animals and humans, but subatomic particles, and the rocks and stars composed of them are also alive, is a universe which Christians should find familiar. Jesus said that even if the crowd kept silent when he entered Jerusalem, the rocks and stones themselves would start to sing (Lk.19.40), and David described all heavenly bodies singing for joy. It seems that every part of the Universe is aware in some way of the immanent presence of God.

Another wonderful discovery of science was the cloud-chamber, which revealed that subatomic particles do not have an independent, continuous existence, but come in and out of existence billions of times every second. This has an important theological implication is that creation did not end in the past, but is continually flowing forth. Countless times every second, every subatomic particle in the entire universe is being re-created. God must think it is worth the effort! God's questions to Job from the whirlwind no longer sound like metaphors— "*Whose skill details every cloud, and tilts the flasks of heaven?*" —but rather, a humble presentation of himself as the passionate and compassionate Sustainer of every aspect of Creation. Jesus presented this constant presence of God with Creation as being proof of the Father's love. In the Sermon on the Mount, he urged us to see that God is not distant, but is so intimately involved with the world that even the beauty of the lilies of the field and the food for the birds of the air comes directly from God's magnificence.

## The Bible on the Divine Presence

*In Christ were created all things in heaven and on earth everything visible and everything invisible ... Before anything was created, he existed, and he holds all things in unity.* —Col. 1-15-17

*... the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him.*  
—2 Chr. 2:6 KJV

Who laid [the earth's] cornerstone  
when all the stars of the morning were singing with joy,  
and the Sons of God in chorus were chanting praise?  
Which is the way to the home of the light,  
and where does darkness live?  
Who carves a channel for the downpour,  
and hacks a way for rolling thunder?  
What womb brings forth the ice,  
and gives birth to the frost of heaven...?  
Whose skill details every cloud  
and tilts the flasks of heaven...?  
Who makes provision for the raven  
when his squabs cry out to God  
and crane their necks in hunger? —Job 38.6-7, 19, 25, 29,  
37, 41.

The heavens declare the glory of God,  
the vault of heaven proclaims his handiwork;  
day discourses of it to day,  
night to night hands on the knowledge. —Ps. 19.1-2

Deep is calling to deep as your cataracts roar;  
All your waves, your breakers have rolled over me. —Ps.  
42.7

Where could I go to escape your spirit?  
Where could I flee from your presence?  
If I climb the heavens, you are there,  
there too, if I lie in Sheol.  
If I flew to the point of sunrise; or westward across the sea  
your hand would still be guiding me, your right hand holding  
me.  
—Ps. 139.7-10

We could say much more and still fall short; to put it concisely, "He is all."

—Sir. 43.27

Do I not fill heaven and earth? It is Yahweh who speaks. — Jer. 23.24

Look at the birds in the sky. They do not toil or reap or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. ... And why worry about clothing? Think of the flowers growing in the fields; they never have to work or spin; yet I assure you that not even Solomon in all his regalia was robed like one of these. —Mt. 5.26, 28-29

If these keep silence, the stones will cry out. —Luke 19:40

Through him all things came to be, not one thing had its being but through him. All that came to be had life in him and that life was the light of men, a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower. —Jn. 1.2-5

The bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world...I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry. —Jn.6.33, 36

In him we live, and move, and have our being.... "We are his offspring." —Acts 17.28 NIV

For from him, and through him and to him are all things. — Rm. 8.36 NIV

There is one God who is father of all, over all, through all and within all. —Eph. 4.6

God is love, and anyone who lives in love, lives in God, and God in him. —1 Jn. 4.16

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. —1 Jn. 1.5

### **Panentheism and Sacrament**

The Panentheistic awareness of God is sacramental awareness. Sacraments are considered vehicles of God's grace coming to us with the form of matter. Bread and wine carry the Body and blood of Christ, human lips proclaim the forgiveness of God, water signs new

birth as it does natural birth. While the Catholic and Orthodox Churches recognize seven sacraments, they recognize that the principle of sacrament is far greater. Creation itself is sacramental. Everything that God created was "very good," according to Genesis, and so, God's goodness comes to us through Creation.

- If God is good, truly the source of all Goodness, then everything that is good carries him in his Goodness in its goodness.
- If God is Love, truly the source of all Love, then everything which loves carries her in her Love in its love.
- If God is Life, truly the source of all Life, then all things which have life have God in God's Life in their life.

God's life gives life to all living things, God's love is in all love, and God's goodness is in all good. The world is full of God, Creation is God-ful, because it is, and God makes it be. Though God is eternal, perfect and transcendent above all, he is utterly, completely and wonderfully within every part of his Creation.

### **Panentheism and Christian Mystical Spirituality**

Most great truths of Christian faith, and perhaps most great truths, period, are expressed as paradox. God is completely One, and yet, Triune and Infinite. Jesus is fully and completely human, but fully divine, as well. Panentheism presents another one: God is completely *transcendent*, and yet, *immanent* throughout his Creation. Like the mysteries of Trinity and Incarnation, panentheism is an ancient theological realization. These mysteries are best served by being left as mysteries. When we try to define them, we take the mystery out of them. God, Trinity, Incarnation, are all mysteries that should not be defined by human beings limited by time and space. Try to define these mysteries and watch the theological battles that ensue. Some faith people even resort to violence when their God-image is violated by a different worldview.

The Greek Church Fathers referred to the transcendence of God as God's "essence" (*ousia*) and the immanence of God as his "energies" (*energeia*). In 553 CE, at the Second Council of Constantinople, the universal Church proclaimed a panentheistic vision of the Trinity, developed from St. Paul's writing in *Ephesians*:

“There is One God and Father *from* whom all things are, one Lord Jesus Christ *through* whom all things are, and one Holy Spirit *in* whom all things are.” God is in all things, for they spring from him, and all things are in God, for they subsist in him, yet he transcends all as well as emanates in all. Throughout the centuries, Christian mystics have encountered God as both “unapproachable Light,” and the “still, small voice” within, seeing the wild things of God in all things. The Christian meditation method called contemplative prayer, or *contemplation*, practiced by innumerable monks and nuns (and now laypeople like us) from the times of the Desert Fathers to the present, goes deep within the heart to meet God, ever-present within, though without thoughts, words, or images, because he is beyond them.

In his magnificent prayer, The Breastplate of St. Patrick (also called the *Lorica*) Patrick expresses a fervent awareness of the presence of God in heaven, in Christ, in nature, in faith, in history, in angels and saints. Patrick first "arises in the strength of" the Oneness and Three-ness of God, then immerses himself into the divine strength in the hosts of heaven, in faith, in servants of God, and in nature:

I arise today, through the strength of Heaven:  
light of Sun, brilliance of Moon, splendor of Fire,  
speed of Lightning, swiftness of Wind, depth of Sea,  
stability of Earth, firmness of Rock.

God's presence in these qualities culminates in the  
Breastplate's soaring call to the universal presence of Christ:

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in  
me,  
Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right,  
Christ on my left,  
Christ in breadth, Christ in length, Christ in height,  
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,  
Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me,  
Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that  
hears me.

St. Francis' praise-poem, The Canticle of Brother Sun, picks up on the sense of a conscious, living Universe. In it, the lights in the sky, the four ancient elements comprising the entire universe, all people of

forgiveness, and even physical death are named as brothers and sisters in a holy family in God.

Johannes Eckhart of Hochheim (better known as Meister Eckhart), a Dominican priest of the 14th century; saw that far from being a quality of Jesus solely, the Son ship of the Son of God is a quality of all creatures. Jesus perfectly manifested and revealed Son ship. Since God the Father is the father of all things, all things are parts of the only-begotten Son, fathered by God. The Father's Word is eternally spoken, and so the Son is eternally begotten. This divinization of all creatures, however, does not reduce God in a pantheistic manner to the Universe, for God remains the unfathomable source of all. To Eckhart, beyond even the Trinity, there is that unfathomable "essence of God" of which nothing can be known and said. Eckhart called this "Godhead," where God is "beyond being," and beyond even oneself, transcending every possible concept of God. This was later called Panentheism, as opposed to Pantheism.

### **Panentheism and other God-views**

Panentheism offers the potential for greater dialogue and communication between Christians and those of other views. Other religions share with Christianity this apprehension of the simultaneous Beyond-ness and Here-ness of the Ultimate as well, even though they use different terms. Buddhism, for instance, speaks of "the Unmade," "the Unconditioned", "the Void"-that which is beyond all concepts on the one hand, but of "Buddha-nature" the divine potential immanent within all "sentient beings," on the other. Furthermore, many people who call themselves atheists or agnostics actually are not; many have a strong sense of a spiritual dimension, but simply find the images of a "personal God" an intellectual hurdle. Often this is because of misunderstandings brought about by poorly communicated concepts of a very man-like God (though with extraordinary powers) somewhere "up above," reacting with wild emotions to events in the world. These simplistic images have offended countless people from believing in God, and countless more from being able to trust him deeply. So millions of Christians find themselves adults with dissonant, childish (and often threatening) images of God, and millions of non-religious people have only seen such images and rightly reject them. For many people, the only God they are familiar with is The Punitive Father preached in most Christian churches. A

God who commands fear from people! That God is unworthy of worship by the new millennium generation.

The panentheism of the Bible is quite different: it certainly presents God as relating to persons and thus "personal," but also as infinitely beyond personality. To communicate God's infinity, the Bible describes God in many non-personal images as well. Consider a few: Spirit, (Jn. 4:24) Sun, (Mal 3:20) Word, (Jn. 1:1) Rock, (1Cor 10:4) Fire, (Heb 12:29) Light, (1 Jn. 1:5) Waters of Life, (Rev 21.1) Wisdom, (Pr 1.20) and Love. (1 Jn. 4:8) Perhaps we should keep in mind that God's "person"-ality is also a metaphor, for (he? she? it? all pronouns fail when contemplating this magnificence!) is as infinitely beyond being a "person" in the traditional sense as the One who created light is beyond being light. No view of God is larger than the panentheistic view. All other theisms (deism, theism, polytheism, animism, pantheism, atheism) are fragmented theologies compared to Panentheism. This is the ground for an inexhaustible faith-that God is present right now, in every cell of our bodies, in every beat of our hearts, in every person, in every star, in every loving thought, birthing every particle of every atom of the entire Creation into a constant stream of existence, the invisible Nothing and Nowhere that brings forth Everything and Everywhere. God in all things and all things in God invites wonder, and wonder invites all to touch God. This is the wonder animating in your body as you read these words. We call it God. You can give it whatever name you desire. Be free to wonder in Wonder! Be free to let **The Mystery** remain mysterious!

### **Panentheism, Pantheism, and Process Theology**

Panentheism is often presented in contrast to pantheism. Really the differences are less than one might think. Few pantheists subscribe to the bland idea that God = Universe. Like panentheists, most pantheists recognize the transcendent One, as well the immanent many, or in other words, the Essence of God, and the energies of God, the Creator and the Creation. Another theological term which refers to God's penetration and permeation of the cosmos is "process theology," which emphasizes the divine Presence unfolding in the processes of this universe of space and time. As St. Paul said, "groaning in one great act of giving birth," to reveal God's children (Rom. 8.19, 22). Theosis and Incarnation show how intimately and lovingly God involves himself with the process of human life. And the Big Bang and hundreds of

billions of galaxies flying through space show the grandeur of the process of God's creation.

All of these concepts point to something inexpressible – it's important not to latch onto a particular theory of reality and miss the Reality itself. Yet the mind yearns to understand something of the dance of the God who is beyond all, and the manifest Creation. Meister Eckhart used the analogy of a drop of water (the Universe) in the ocean (God). The drop “is” ocean, has the qualities of ocean, and ocean permeates it. But the ocean is not a drop, and can never “depend” upon a drop. God is in Creation because he is the very Ground of Being, and lovingly sustains it, not because he is it. We are the process, called to join God in all her work. We are not alone, but God is with us. In all things!

### **The Bible on the Christ within**

In this section I will present a basic recovery of The Christ within from many biblical sources, beginning with the tradition in Israel and concluding with the New Testament scriptures. By returning to our sources, we gain an impetus and an understanding about the rich doctrine of *The Christ Within* that Christianity has hidden within its bosom for centuries. As Joseph Stittler put it, “the theological magnificence of Cosmic Christology lies for the most part, still tightly folded in the Church’s innermost heart and memory.” Teilhard de Chardin calls the Cosmic Christ the “third nature” of Christ, meaning that it takes us beyond the fourth-century definitions of Christ’ human and divine natures into a third realm, “neither human nor divine, but cosmic.” Is this not what the Trinity doctrine was trying to point to? Chardin further comments that this has “not noticeably attracted the explicit attention of the faithful or of theologians.”

**Pre-Existent Wisdom:** The Cosmic Christ or Christ within was present in Israel and in the Hebrew Bible principally as cosmic wisdom. Wisdom is personified in Proverbs (1:20-33; 8:1-36; 9:1-6). Let us read together:

Wisdom calls aloud in the streets, she raises her voice in the public squares; she calls out at the street corners, she delivers her message at the city gates. – Proverbs 1:20-21

Yahweh created me when his purpose first unfolded, before the oldest of his works. From everlasting I was firmly set, from the beginning, before earth came into being. The deep was not, when I was born, there were no springs to gush with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I came to birth; before he made the earth, the countryside, or the first grains of the world's dust. When he fixed the heaven firm, I was there. – Proverbs 8:22-26

The wisdom texts of Israel play an important part in Christian scriptures. Christ (the Christ within) is the source of true wisdom that comes from God (1 Cor. 1:30)

### The Prophets

The God of the prophets, like light and wisdom, is the God who is everywhere. The Cosmic Christ is present in the prophets and in certain messianic expectations:

Am I a God close at hand, and not a God far off? Can anyone hide oneself in secret places where I shall not see him? Do I not fill heaven and earth? – Jeremiah 23:23-24

For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. - Isaiah 11:9

The word of Yahweh was addressed to me, saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you came to birth I consecrated you; I have appointed you as a prophet to the nations.' Jer. 1:5

### New Testament Scripture

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him **all things** were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities – **all things** were created through him and for him. He is before **all things**, and in him **all things** hold together. He is the first-born from the dead, that in **everything** he might be pre-eminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself **all things**, whether on earth or in

heaven, making peace by his death on the cross – Colossians 1: 15 – 20

The phrase “all things” is repeated six times in this brief passage. I was raised in a fundamentalist worldview that taught me – all things mean, **all things**! We are told here, that ALL THINGS hold together in Christ. Does “all things” exclude other things? Is this then not the dreaded theology of panentheism – God in all things and beyond all things? We have to celebrate panatheism and see each other as human beings made in the image of the invisible God. We are, individually, an image of the invisible God. **I am** an image of the invisible God. All human beings have the image of the invisible God inside them. All human beings are begotten of God. I am the only begotten Son of God. You are the only begotten Daughter of God. This is what the coming of Jesus Christ, as the only begotten Son of God, means to us all today.

Blessed be the God and Creator of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world... For God has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of the divine will, according to the divine purpose which God set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite **all things** in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth. – Ephesians 1:3 – 4; 9 – 10

God has put **all things** under Christ’s feet and has made Christ the head over **all things** for the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all in all. – Ephesians 1: 22 – 23

In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God. This Word was with God in the beginning. Through it **all things** came to be, not one thing had its beginning but through it.- John 1:1-3

### The Mystics

The creation-centred mystics of the middle ages celebrated the Christ within with vigour. From Hildegard of Bingen (twelfth century) to Francis of Assisi, Thomas Aquinas, Mechtild of Magdeburg, Dante, and Meister Eckhart (thirteen and fourteenth centuries), and Nicolas of

Cusa (fifteenth century), a cosmology of the cosmic Christ was celebrated. I have chosen only two of these mystics for their naming of the Cosmic Christ experience.

**Meister Eckhart:** No Christian mystic has so richly developed the theme of the Christ within as Meister Eckhart (1260-1327). He celebrates the Logos or ‘word’ of God as applying to each and every creature:

All creatures are words of God. My mouth expresses and reveals God but the existence of a stone does the same and people often recognize more from actions than from words ... People think God only became a human being there – in historical incarnation – but that is not so; God is here – in this very place – just as much incarnate as in a human being long ago. And this is why God has become a human being: that God might give birth to you as the only begotten Son (or Daughter), and no less.

**Julian of Norwich:** Still another champion of the Christ within in the Middle Ages was Julian of Norwich (1342-1415). She is the first person to speak about the “in-n-e-s-s” of God in all creatures. She writes:

In my understanding I saw God in a point. In seeing this I saw God is in all things. God works in creatures because God is in the mid-point of everything...”See- I am God. See – I am in everything. See – I lead everything towards the purpose for which I ordained it, without beginning, by the same Power, Wisdom and Love by which I created it. How could anything be amiss”...”This I am. This I am. I am what you love. I am what you enjoy. I am what you serve. I am what you long for. I am what you desire. I am what you intend. I am all that is.”

### **The Divine “I AM” in Every Creature**

As we saw in the scriptures and the medieval mystics, one of the most common themes in Cosmic Christ theology is a celebration of how common and omnipresent divinity is. Divinity is found in all Holy Scriptures across all religions; in all human beings; in all living things; in all spiritualities; in all religions. The divine name from Exodus 3:14, “I AM who I AM,” is appropriated by Jesus who shows us how

to embrace our own divinity. The Cosmic Christ is the “I AM” in every creature. The divine mystery and miracle of existence is laid bare in the unique existence of each atom, each galaxy, each tree, bird, fish, dog, flower, star, rock, and human being of any religion or spiritual faith. Meister Eckhart says that, “in this breakthrough I discover that God and I are one. There I am what I was, and I grow neither smaller nor bigger, for there I am an immovable cause that moves all things.” This “**I am**” language is mysterious, but it also touches me at a very deep place. My life is a unique and beautiful expression of the Divine One; the unique image of God that came to birth not only when I was in my mother’s womb, but before the foundations of the universe. That is billions and billions of years ago. That image within the core of my being will continue for billions and billions of years after my physical body has gone back to dust.

In the Gospel of John, the “**I am**” sayings attributed to Jesus play a prominent role:

I am the bread of life (or living bread) (6:48)

I am the light of the world (8:12; 9:5)

I am the gate (10:7,9)

I am the model shepherd (10:11, 14)

I am the resurrection and the life (11:25)

I am the way, the truth, and the life (14:6)

I am the real vine (15:1, 5)

I view these revelations as my calling to be to other people what Jesus has been to me. Jesus is also quoted saying; “If you did this to one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it to me.” (Matt 25:41) There are hundreds of other biblical verses similar to these ones that we can “reason together” on. Our own scripture is far richer in a Cosmic Christ theology than we have been taught. The fact remains, that Christianity shall never be a tribal religion exclusive to a certain sector of people, like Judaism was in the first century. We Christians have to come to terms with the fact that the one we knew as Christ our Lord is also known by others using different symbols to create meaning for them. The Cosmic Christ is the divine pattern that connects in the person of Jesus Christ. It is not limited to the person of Jesus Christ. The divine pattern of connectivity was *made flesh and*

*set up its tent among us* (John 1:14). In a special way the “us” includes the dispossessed – those least connected, those least established and least part of the connections that “the establishment” has to offer. Jesus offered connections to the dispossessed in particular: to the lepers, women, slaves, sinners, and outcasts of society. He connected with them not only by conversation and scandalous associations at meals but by undergoing the death of the unconnected, the death of the dispossessed on Golgotha. We are called, like the Cosmic Christ, to radiate the divine presence to one another. *“And we, with our unveiled faces reflecting like mirrors the glory of the Lord; all grow brighter and brighter as we are turned into the image we reflect”* (2 Cor. 3:18). The hard to swallow truth remains; the Cosmic Christ has rendered all a holy nation, a royal priesthood. We all join in this hymn to the Cosmic Christ. In his very insightful book, *The Coming of The Cosmic Christ*, Matthew Fox suggests that embracing the Cosmic Christ will demand the following paradigm shift:

<b>From</b>	<b>To</b>
From anthropocentrism	To a living cosmology
From Newton	To Einstein
From parts-mentality	To wholeness
From rationalism	To mysticism
From obedience as a prime moral virtue	To creativity as a prime moral virtue
From personal salvation	To communal healing, i.e compassion as salvation
From theism (God outside us)	To panentheism (God in us and us in God)
From fall-redemption	To creation centred
From religion	To Spirituality
From ascetic	To the aesthetic

The birthing of the Cosmic Christ is a cosmic act involving cosmic labour pains. The Church is going through those pains at the moment. To truly give birth to something new is an awesome responsibility. We are Cosmic Christ/s in some way, also called to birth the yet unborn Cosmic Christ. Paul celebrates the theme of our being other Christ/s and our growing into other Christ/s when he says, “I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). He sees his work as a preacher of Good News (Gal. 1:16) to be that of

giving birth to the Christ/s. “I must go through the pain of giving birth to you all over again, until Christ is formed in you” (Gal. 4:19). The Cosmic Christ is present wherever there is pain. The Cosmic Christ unites all this pain in the one divine heart, in the one divine – but wounded – body of the Christ which is the body of the universe. The Cosmic Christ is the crucified and suffering one in every creature, just as much as the Cosmic Christ is the radiant one, the divine mirror glistening and glittering in every creature. Divinity is not spared suffering – that is the lesson of the Cosmic Christ who suffers.

There are many similarities between the first century and the twenty first century. The first century Christians were also concerned with the future of the world. They were expecting a new word to break in upon them very soon – sometimes they called it the Kingdom of God, sometimes they spoke of it as ‘a new heaven and new earth’, and sometimes ‘the second coming of Christ’. They were definitely future-oriented.

### **Remythologizing Our Species**

Dr. Mathew Fox has proposed the following myths as fertile ground for artists and ritual, for economists, theologians, scientists and all workers, for parents and grand-parents , for children, and all peoples;

1. The myth that all our spiritual traditions can learn from each other and offer something fresh from their experiences and teachings. That is, the myth of Deep Ecumenism.
2. The myth that all Creation is sacred and we humans are part of it, integral to it, though late on the scene. Ecological care and concern is part of being here.
3. The myth that all Creation is on fire with sacredness; that the Buddha nature and the Cosmic Christ and the image of God reside in the very light (photons) present in every atom in the universe.
4. The myth that community already is because all things are interdependent, nothing stands alone. Isolation and rugged individualism are lies that betray the very manner in which the universe operates. The truth is that interdependence exists at the microcosmic and macrocosmic and psychic levels of existence. We need to remove the obstacles that interfere with our realizing this truth about community.

5. The myth that whatever name we give the Source of sources, the Artist of artists, the Creator of Creation, all are accurate and none are sufficient.
6. The myth that the Divine has a feminine as well as a masculine side. And so do we, made in her image.
7. The myth that divine Wisdom roams the world, “fills the whole earth,” interacts with us and all Creation and calls us to supper.
8. The myth that the Divine, while present in all forms, is also present as emptiness, nothingness, and formlessness and that we experience emptiness, nothingness, and formlessness and can trust these experiences.
9. The myth that the Divine “I AM” can be spoken by every one of us and by every creature and this is our way of asserting our divine nobility and exuding a radiance greater than ourselves.
10. The myth that we experience mindfulness, a state of being more and more fully present to the “I AM” and to our deepest self through meditations of various kinds.
11. The myth that our imaginations are holy, that the Holy Spirit works through us when we create and participate in the ongoing Creation of self, society, and mind.
12. The myth that joy is possible even daily – and that we have a right to it as well as a responsibility to search it out, prepare for it, and pass it on.
13. The myth that suffering, while it is everywhere, is real yet enduring. That suffering comes as a teacher of wisdom and compassion and rather than fleeing it, we ought to sit at its feet and learn what it wants to teach us.
14. The myth that Beauty is another name for the Divine, that it is available everywhere, and that our task is to become ever more aware of its presence and be sharers of its energy.
15. The myth that our sexuality is sacred, that the body is no obstacle to Divine presence, that love-making is a holy meditation as fasting and serving, and that love-making is for the propagation of community and love as much as for

propagation of the species (which clearly needs no propagation at this time).

16. The myth that our dying is adventurous as our living and that what occurs at death and after death, whether we call it reincarnation or resurrection or regeneration, is mysterious but not final. No beauty dies; no grace is lost; no warmth is forgotten.
17. The myth that compassion is the imitation of the Divine and compassion includes celebration and relief of pain and suffering and the active struggle against injustice. That service is something we can commit ourselves to what is worthy of full commitment.
18. The myth that we are all spiritual warriors (or prophets) as well as lovers (or mystics). And this means that we struggle with self and not just with outside enemies when we struggle for social transformation; it also means that we work from the heart and not just from reaction.

### The Shift From Modernism To Postmodernism

One way to understand the times we live in is to understand the shift that is occurring from modern to *postmodern* consciousness. Fundamentalism is just a response to postmodern times. Dr. Mathew Fox has suggested the following chart will assist the movement from modernism to postmodernism:

MODERN CONSCIOUSNESS	POSTMODERN CONSCIOUSNESS
Began with the invention of the printing press	Began with the invention of electronic media
Emphasizes text	Emphasizes context
Emphasizes words	Emphasizes dance and images
Throws out the past	Conserves some aspects of the past and lets go of others
Focuses on conquest	Focuses on our common survival
Anthropocentric	Ecological / Cosmological
Christ is identified exclusively with Jesus	The Cosmic Christ and Buddha nature exist in all things
The aesthetic is de-emphasized and is seen as subjective	The aesthetic and political are basic to common morality
Innovation conquers tradition	A tension exists between

<p>Truth is in the head; emphasizes “clear and distinct ideas”</p> <p>Anti-mystical</p> <p>Worshippers sit</p> <p>Form is absolute (mechanical law)</p> <p>Dismissed pre-modern wisdom</p> <p>Focuses on the part; emphasizes the part rather than the whole</p> <p>Operates from denominational identity</p> <p>Functions on a tribal model</p> <p>Perspective is either/or</p> <p>Fosters separateness</p> <p>Social change involves only external structures</p> <p>Embraces religion</p> <p>Is serious and sombre in tone</p> <p>Obedience is primitive virtue</p> <p>Incorporates objective rules</p> <p>Institutes rigid and clear boundaries</p> <p>Resulted in the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation</p>	<p>innovation and tradition</p> <p>Truth is in the whole body and all the chakras</p> <p>Eager for mysticism</p> <p>Worshippers dance</p> <p>Form evolves</p> <p>Eagerly accepts pre modern wisdom</p> <p>Cosmological; focuses on the whole (cosmos and ecosystems)</p> <p>Operates from deep ecumenism and interfaith identity</p> <p>Functions on a community model</p> <p>Perspective accepts double coding and a belief that we are interdependent</p> <p>Fosters mixing and honours diversity</p> <p>Social change involves both internal psyche and external structures</p> <p>Embraces spirituality</p> <p>Recognizes the value of fun and play</p> <p>Creativity, a law of the universe, is to be imitated</p> <p>Incorporates relativity</p> <p>Acknowledges that boundaries are fading</p> <p>Calls for a New Protestant and Catholic Reformation that is also a transformation.</p>
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## Chapter 8 - Epilogue

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I am releasing this book as my 25th wedding anniversary gift to the Christian tribe which has been a lifelong source of inspiration to me. My journey through life has been nothing short of an awesome unfolding mystery. I no longer seek to understand this mystery, I just embrace it. I am totally convinced that I am what God wanted me to be at this very point of my life. Whoever or whatever God is; has been good to me beyond my dreams and my imagination. I thank those who have contributed immensely to my becoming. The network of people who have done so many things to shape my life cannot be numbered. My life has been shaped by so many people I met through my childhood upbringing, my adolescent life, my adult life, my early Christian upbringing, the churches I joined and left, the ministries I got involved in and left, the businesses I joined left, rejoined, left and rejoined and stole businesses from them. *Life has been quite a daring but also painful adventure.* Helen Keller, a blind and deaf educationist, once said these words. She added that security is mostly a superstition that does not exist in nature. I have over the years learnt to embrace the insecurity of life.

The journey has been quite long. I look back and think about the theme we have chosen for our 25th wedding anniversary; **Through All The Season Of Life.** We have definitely gone through all the seasons of life; summer and winter; autumn and spring; day and night; high and low; joy and pain; negative and positive; hope and despair; birth and death, etc. We have experienced the reality of human joy, we know what it means to love and live. We know the warmth of human friendships, the peace and pleasure that comes from sharing life; what it means to be trusted and to trust; to be cared for and to care; to be forgiven and to forgive. We have experienced the gift of love, love that heals, accepts, dispels fear, and embraces with understanding. We have seen love lift us up and make us stand on our feet. We have seen love make us live again, again, and again; this love gave us the courage to dare again, love again, and risk loving

again. We know what it means to have money like dust. We know what it means to be in Canaan, the promised land. We call this **Heaven!**

We also know what it is to be poor, very poor. To be so poor that even poor folks remark that we are poor. We also know what it means to be hurt, to be misunderstood, to be alienated, to be alone, to be outside the forgiveness of friends, and to ache in a broken relationship. We know the pain that comes when life is denied, when rejection kills, when hurt has driven us more deeply into the shell of our insecurities. We know what it means to live in aching isolation, apart from friendship, meaning, and the love of those we admire. We know what it means to be denied abundant life. We know what it means to go through the dark night of the soul; to be like Abraham facing an unknown future. We call this **HELL!** We have gone through hell in our marriage. **We Have Been Through It All!** Just like in the opening lines in Charles Dickens *A Tale of Two Cities*?

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all doing direct the other way.

As the poet Rilke said, “Let everything happen to you, beauty and terror, no feeling is final.” This is a great celebration reminder. Twenty five years of marriage has given us the best and worst of times. We have let it all happen. No feelings are final and no seasons are final. Even as we were preparing for this celebration our marriage was engulfed in another bitter winter season. We are still expecting more seasons in the coming twenty five years of our marriage (hopefully). Gratitude has no need to compare or compete. It celebrates what is. Life keeps moving. No feeling lasts forever. There is no escaping of life’s traumas, no security, no lasting peace of mind. While circumstances can feel harsh and unending, gratitude finds new ways to express itself. Victor Frankl explained this truth:

We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from

a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances ...

Anthony de Mello tells a story about the connection between gratitude and service:

After a monsoon rain, an old man went out and dug some holes in his garden.

“What are you doing?” - His neighbor asked.

“Planting mango trees”, was the reply.

“Do you expect to eat mangoes from those trees?”

“No, I won't live long enough for that. But others will. It occurred to me the other day that all my life I have enjoyed mangoes planted by other people. This is my way of showing them my gratitude.”

I found this story very touching indeed. I thought of all the people who lived before me and paved the way for the life I live today. This made me to be truly thankful. To keep on giving, showing my gratitude to those who have paved the way for my life, and also commit to passing on to future generations what I have received in abundance. To plant, so our kids can enjoy the pain of our labor; prepare them for tomorrow's world and not blind their spirits with the prejudices of our time; and, not poison their hearts with the hatreds and fears of our generation; but, give them freedom to find God in the accents of their generation. And finally, give them a gospel they can believe, a Christ they can serve, and a God they can worship in the twenty first century. It also reminds me on Walt Disney, the founder of Walt Disney World, he died at a very young age, but he died after building the first phase of an entertainment place that has now become heaven on earth.

My favorite grace comes from the Buddhist Monk, Thich Nhat Hanh:

My plate, now empty, will soon be filled with precious food. In this food, I see the presence of the entire universe supporting my existence. Many beings are struggling for food today. I pray that they all may have enough to eat.

Now that's a grace, full of awareness and gratitude for the interrelated cycles of life.

Give thanks for community and interdependence, the God between, the God who goes by many names; Life, Creative Process, Gaia, Yahweh, Consciousness, Absolute Spirit, Interrelatedness, Ground of Being, Jesus Christ, Buddha nature, Ancestors, or whatever other name has meaning for you. It's greater than you; but utterly dependent on you and your choices at the same time.

William Blake said:

Gratitude is heaven itself. Make this a day of enormous gratitude. Smile often. Say thank you regularly. Give praise lavishly. Hug bearishly. Listen generously. Be playfully present. Then look back at the end of the day at the pieces of heaven you have created.

After twenty five years of marriage I have a confession to make. I know my wife. I actually know my wife so well, that I know exactly which words to speak to her to make her cry. This is what makes relationships so bitter and sad at times. I love my wife, Lydia. I will always love Lydia. I always pray to God that she will not die before me, for the sake of our kids. But, if she does die before me – I will always love her even in death. I look back at the lies that I told my wife. The first lie was the very words “I LOVE YOU”. Love is like time – they both belong to God; and God only. Human beings can only try, and in trying, grow in loving. The next lie that I told her was when making our wedding vows, when I said, “for better or for worse, for richer or poorer”. This is what the church teaches us, and this is the reason why I now have a problem with what the church teaches. I look back and think, “how on earth could I have promised to love my wife ‘for worse’ when I did not define what that ‘worse’ meant to me?” How can any human being promise to love another for worse when they do not even know the definition of what “worse” means? How could I promise her, “for richer or poorer” without explaining what these term actually mean in reality? What is “worse” and what is “better”? I look back at my poor and humble upbringing in the dusty streets of Evaton, and ask, “Was it better or worse”? Was it better to sleep the whole night without taking sleeping drugs? Was it better to go to sleep not worrying about a global economic situation beyond your control? I can no longer, with honesty, define better or worse. Are these not the recipes for high divorce statistics amongst Christians, statistics that are now overtaking the world? I read the story of Hosea in the Bible, where Hosea married a serial prostitute, and ask myself if we ever have that “worse” in mind when we vow “for better or worse”? What is “better” or “worse” to a

person who abandons his mansion and opts to live in a shack? Is the shack dwelling better than the mansion He has abandoned? What did the writer of Proverbs mean when He said, “*It is better to live alone in the corner of an attic than with a quarrelsome wife (or bully husband) in a lovely home.*” Prov. 21:9. End of January 2010 I attended Bishop Noel Jones’s 60th birthday anniversary. We then facilitated a discussion on church life with Pastors who were attending. This is where the above issues were raised and responded to. One divorced lady made this following remark:

I hate church for what it made me do for the past 18 years that was I married to my husband. For the eighteen years of our marriage, my husband not only told me he was going to divorce me, he also abused me physically. The church made me pray and stay, and be patient, wait upon God to change my husband. My husband continued telling me he was going to divorce me, continued abusing me, year after year. I wanted to get out of the marriage but stayed because the church asked me to stay. They told me to believe God for a breakthrough. I waited and waited in vain. The church stole my personal decision making and my personal happiness for eighteen years. I am very happy now that I am a divorced person.

### **The Messiah lives amongst you**

Once there was a monastery with a long history of commerce and a thriving spiritual community. But as time wore on, fewer and fewer villagers visited the hallowed halls. Fewer people turned to the monastery for advice. Even the sale of their famous wines began to dwindle. The abbot began to despair for his community. “What should they do?” he wondered. They prayed daily for guidance, but the brothers only became more dispirited. The monastery itself reflected their mood, becoming shabby and untidy. At last the Abbot, hearing that a wise Jewish rabbi was visiting, swallowed his pride and went to visit the rabbi to ask his advice.

The abbot and the rabbi visited for a long time. They talked of their respective religions, and the fickleness of human nature. The abbot explained his problem to the rabbi and asked for advice, but the Jewish sage only shook his head and smiled. As the abbot sadly departed, the rabbi suddenly rose and shouted after him, “Ah, but take heart my friend for the Messiah lives amongst you!”

All the way home the abbot pondered the rabbi's words, "The Messiah lives amongst you." What could he mean? Did the Messiah live in the abbey? The abbot knew all the brothers very well. Could one of them really be the Messiah? Surely he, the abbot, was not the Messiah... Was it possible?" Upon reaching the monastery the abbot confided the rabbi's words to another brother, who told another brother, who was overheard telling another brother. Soon the whole abbey had heard the news. "The Messiah lives amongst us!" "Who do you suppose he could be?"

As each brother speculated on who the Messiah could be, his view of his brothers began to change. Brother Louis no longer appeared simple, but rather innocent. Brother Jacques was no longer uncompromising, but rather striving for spiritual perfection. The brothers began to treat each other with greater respect and courtesy; after all, one never knew when he might be speaking to the Messiah. And, as each brother discovered that his own words were taken seriously, the thought that he might become the Messiah would cross his humble mind. He would square his shoulders and attend his work with greater care and start acting like a Messiah.

Soon the neighboring villages began to notice the change that had come over the monastery. The brothers seemed so happy. Villagers flocked to the monastery and were energized by the spirit of the Brothers. And so the spirit grew and the monastery flourished. As each new brother was welcomed, the question arose, "Could he be the Messiah?" Apparently the monastery still prospers today and it is often whispered both within its walls and in the surrounding towns that the Messiah lives amongst them.

Jesus Christ is the Messiah that heals my brokenness. In him I find the forgiveness that redeems my un-loveliness. To believe in Christ, to me, is to know that I am loved for what I am; to discover the courage to be myself; to accept my worth, my value, and my dignity. To believe in Christ, to me, is to live as if the ultimate source of Life, the final judge of human beings, has proclaimed me to be of infinite value. My calling is to be; to be a Messiah to those who eagerly wait for the Messiah.

As we celebrate our twenty fifth wedding anniversary, this year; may we remind you that the Messiah lives among you. The Messiah lives in you. The Messiah is you. You will see a lot of people in street corners waiting for a Messiah. Think of the generations that will be living years after you are gone. Dare to be a Messiah!

## Acknowledgements

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There are many theologians, clerics, mentors, spiritual directors, and advisors who have spoken into my life through the journey of my spiritual life. I am grateful to them all; for their contribution through all the colours and stages of my spiritual life. I acknowledge the help and friendship of my friend and Spiritual Director, Jackson Khosa, who has become my "partner in crime" in my new spiritual journey. I am also particularly grateful to the following people who are my current spiritual mentors. I acknowledge their contribution in the shaping of this book. Most of the current shapers of my spirituality are associated with The Jesus Seminar and its theology Professors. Their insight and contribution in shaping my current spiritual path is invaluable. This book's contents were shaped by the various books mentioned below.

**Bishop John Shelby Spong:** An Episcopal Bishop of Newark for 24 years, before his retirement in 2000. As a visiting lecturer at Harvard and at universities and churches throughout North America and the English-speaking world, he is one of the leading spokespersons for liberal Christianity. His books include *Jesus for the Non-Religious*, *A New Christianity for a New World*, *Why Christianity must change or die*, *Liberating the Gospels*, and *Eternal Life*.

**Dr. Matthew Fox:** a member of the Dominican Order for thirty-four years. He is the foremost proponent of creation spirituality, based on the mystical teachings of early Christian visionaries such as Hildegard von Bingen, Meister Eckhart, and Saint Thomas Aquinas. He is the author of twenty-six books, including *Original Blessing*, *Prayer: a Radical Response to Life*, *One River Many Wells*, *A New Reformation*, and *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*.

**Professor Marcus Borg:** author and bestseller of books that include; *The Heart of Christianity*, *Meeting Jesus Again for the first time*, *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time*, *The God we never knew*, *The Meaning of Jesus- Two Visions* (with N.T. Wright). He is the

Hundere Distinguished Professor of Religion at Oregon State University.

**Professor Walter Wink:** Renowned theologian and biblical scholar who has helped me to reformulate my traditional concepts of God, Satan, angels, demons, principalities, and powers – in the light of what I thought I knew. I have been transformed by the following books He authored: *The Powers that be (1998): Theology for a New Millennium*; *Naming The Powers (1984): The language of Power in the New Testament*; *Engaging The Powers (1992): Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*; *Homosexuality and Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for The Church*.

**Professor Harvey Cox:** one of the preeminent theologians in the United States and served as Hollis Research Professor of Divinity at the Harvard Divinity School, until his retirement in October 2009. Cox's research and teaching focus on theological developments in global Christianity, including liberation theology and the role of Christianity in Latin America. His latest seminal work on *The Future of Faith* (2009) has added immensely to the development of this book.

**Brian D McLaren:** an author, speaker, pastor, and networker among innovative Christian leaders, thinkers, and activists. His groundbreaking books include; *A New Kind of Christian*, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, *The Secret Message of Jesus*, *Everything Must Change*, and the newly released *A New Kind of Christianity*. He was named by Time magazine as one of America's top twenty-five evangelicals.

## Appendix A

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### **95 Theses or Articles of Faith for a-Christianity for the Third Millennium – by Dr Matthew Fox**

1. God is both Mother and Father.
2. At this time in history, God is more Mother than Father because the feminine is most missing and it is important to bring back gender balance.
3. God is always new, always young, and always “in the beginning.”
4. God the Punitive Father is not a God worth honouring, but a false god and an idol that serves empire builders. The notion of a punitive, all-male God, is contrary to the full nature of the Godhead, who is as much female and motherly as masculine and fatherly.
5. “All the names we give to God come from an understanding of ourselves” (Meister Eckhart). Thus people who worship a Punitive Father are themselves punitive.
6. *Theism* (the idea that God is “out there” or above and beyond the universe) is false. All things are in God and God is in all things (*panentheism*).
7. Everyone is born a mystic and a lover who experiences the unity of things, and all are called to keep alive this mystic or lover of life.
8. All are called to be prophets, which is to interfere with injustice.

9. *Wisdom* is love of life. (See the Book of Wisdom, “This is wisdom: to love life,” and Christ in John’s Gospel: “I have come that you may have life and have it in abundance.”)
10. God loves all Creation; and science can help us more deeply penetrate and appreciate the mysteries and wisdom of God in creation. Science is no enemy of true religion.
11. Religion is not necessary, but spirituality is.
12. “Jesus does not call us to a new religion, but to life” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer). Spirituality is living life at a depth of newness and gratitude, courage and creativity, trust and letting go, compassion and justice.
13. Spirituality and religion are not the same anymore than education and learning, law and justice, or commerce and stewardship are the same.
14. Christians must distinguish between God (masculine and history, liberation and salvation) and Godhead (feminine and mystery, being and nonaction).
15. Christians must distinguish between Jesus (a historical figure) and Christ (the experience of God – in – all – things).
16. Christians must distinguish between Jesus and Paul.
17. Jesus, not unlike many spiritual teachers, taught us that we are sons and daughters of God and are to act accordingly by becoming instruments of divine compassion.
18. *Eco-justice* is a necessity for planetary survival and human ethics; without it we are crucifying the Christ all over again in the form of destruction of forests, waters, species, air and soil.
19. *Sustainability* is another word for justice, for what is just is sustainable and what is unjust is not.
20. A preferential option for the poor, as found in the base community movement, is far closer to the teaching and spirit of Jesus than is preferential option for the rich and powerful.

21. Economic justice requires the work of creativity to birth a system of economics that is global, respectful of the health and wealth of the earth systems, and that works for all.
22. Celebration and worship are key to human community and survival, and such reminders of joy deserve new forms that speak in the language of the twenty-first century.
23. Sexuality is sacred and a spiritual experience, a theopany (revelation of the Divine), a mystical experience. It is holy and deserves to be honoured as such.
24. Creativity is both humanity's greatest gift and its most powerful weapon for evil, and so it ought to be both encouraged and steered to humanity's most God-like activity, which all religions agree is compassion.
25. There is a priesthood of all workers (all who are doing good work are midwives of grace and are therefore priests), and this priesthood ought to be honoured as sacred and workers should be instructed in spirituality in order to carry on their ministry effectively.
26. Empire-building is incompatible with Jesus' life and teaching and with Paul's life and teaching and with the teaching of holy religions.
27. *Ideology* is not theology; ideology endangers the faith because it replaces thinking with obedience and distracts from the responsibility of theology to adapt the wisdom of the past to today's needs. Instead of thinking, it demands loyalty oaths to the past.
28. Loyalty is not sufficient criterion for ecclesial office – intelligence and proven conscience are.
29. No matter how much television media fawn over the pope and papacy because it makes good theatre, the pope is not the Church but has a ministry within the Church. *Papalotry* is a contemporary form of idolatry and must be resisted by all believers.

30. Creating a Church of sycophants is not a holy thing. Sycophants (*Webster's Dictionary* defines them as “servile, self-seeking flatters”) are not spiritual people, for their only virtue is obedience. A society of sycophants – sycophant clergy; sycophant seminarians; sycophant bishops; sycophant cardinals; sycophant religious orders; and the sycophant press – do not represent in any way the teachings or the person of the historical Jesus, who chose to stand up to power rather than amassing it.
31. Vows of pontifical secrecy are a certain way to corruption and cover-up in the Church, as in any human organization.
32. Original Sin is an ultimate expression of a Punitive Father God and is not a biblical teaching. But Original Blessing (goodness and grace) is original.
33. The term original wound better describes the separation humans experience on leaving the womb and entering the world – a world that is often unjust and unwelcoming – than does Original Sin.
34. Fascism and the compulsion to control are not paths to peace or compassion; and those who practice fascism are not fitting models for sainthood. The seizing of the apparatus of canonization to canonize fascists is a stain on the Church.
35. The Spirit of Jesus and other prophets calls people to simple lifestyles in order that “the people may live.”
36. Dance, whose root meaning in many indigenous cultures is the same as *breath* or *spirit*, is a very ancient and appropriate form in which to pray.
37. To honour the ancestors and celebrate the communion of saints does not mean putting heroes on pedestals, but rather honouring them by living out lives of imagination, courage, and compassion in our own time, culture, and historical moment, as they did in theirs.

38. A diversity of interpretation of the Jesus event and the Christ experience is altogether expected and welcome, as it was in the earliest days of the Church.
39. Therefore *unity* of church does not mean *conformity*. There is unity in diversity. Coerced unity is not unity.
40. The Holy Spirit is perfectly capable of working through participatory democracy in church structures; hierarchical and dominating modes of operating can indeed interfere with the work of the Spirit.
41. The body is an awe-filled, sacred Temple of God. This does not mean it is untouchable, but rather that each of its dimensions, well-named by the seven chakras, is as holy as others.
42. Thus our connection with the earth (first chakra) is holy; and our sexuality (second chakra) is holy; and our moral outrage (third chakra) is holy; and our love that stands up to fear (fourth chakra) is holy; and our prophetic voice that speak out (fifth chakra) is holy; and our intuition and intelligence (sixth chakra) are holy; and our gifts we extend to the community of light beings and ancestors (seventh chakra) are holy.
43. The prejudice of rationalism and the left brain, located in the head, must be balanced by attention to the lower chakras as equal places for wisdom and truth and Spirit to act.
44. The central chakra, compassion, is the test of the health of all the others, which are meant to serve it, for “by their fruits you will know them” (Jesus).
45. “Joy is the human’s noblest act” (Thomas Aquinas). Are our culture and its professions, education, and religion, promoting joy?
46. The human psyche is made for the cosmos and will not be satisfied until the two are reunited and awe, the beginning of wisdom, results from this reunion.

47. The four paths named in the creation spiritual tradition more fully name the mystical/prophetic spiritual journey of Jesus and the Jewish tradition than do the three paths of purgation, illumination, and union, which do not derive from the Jewish and biblical tradition.
48. Thus it can be said that God is experienced through ecstasy, joy, wonder, and delight (*via positiva*).
49. God is experienced through darkness, chaos, nothingness, suffering, silence, and in learning to let go and let be (*via negativa*).
50. God is experienced through acts of creativity and co-creation (*via creativa*).
51. All people are born creative. It is spirituality's task to encourage holy imagination, for all are born in the "image and likeness" of the Creative One, and "the fierce power of imagination is a gift from God" (Kabbalah).
52. If you can talk, you can sing; if you can walk, you can dance (African proverb). If you can talk, you are an artist (Native American saying).
53. God is experienced in our struggle for justice, healing, compassion, and celebration (*via transformativa*).
54. The Holy Spirit works through all cultures and all spiritual traditions; it "blows where it will" and is not the exclusive domain of any one tradition and never has been.
55. God speaks today, as in the past, through all religions and all cultures and all faith traditions, none of which is perfect and an exclusive avenue to truth, but all of which can learn from each other.
56. Therefore, an interfaith identity or deep ecumenism; are necessary parts of spiritual praxis and awareness in our time.
57. Since the number one obstacle to an interfaith identity is "a bad relationship with one's own faith" (the Dalai Lama), it is important that Christians know their own mystical and

prophetic tradition, one that is larger than a religion of empire and its Punitive Father images of God.

58. The cosmos is God's holy temple and our holy home.
59. Fourteen billion years of evolution and unfolding of the universe bespeak the intimate sacredness of all that is.
60. All that is holy and all that is; is related, for all being in our universe began as one being just before the fireball erupted.
61. Interconnectivity is not only a law of physics and of nature, but also forms the basis of community and compassion. Compassion is the working out of our shared interconnectivity, both as to our shared joy and our shared suffering and struggle for justice.
62. The universe does not suffer from a shortage of grace, and no religious institution is to see its task as rationing grace. Grace is abundant in God's universe.
63. Creation, incarnation, and resurrection are continuously happening on a cosmic as well as a personal scale. So too are life, death, and resurrection (regeneration and incarnation) happening on a cosmic scale as well as a personal one.
64. *Biophilia*, or love of life, is everyone's daily task.
65. *Necrophilia*, or love of death, is to be opposed in self and society in all its forms.
66. Evil can happen through every people, every nation, every tribe, every individual human, and so vigilance and self-criticism and institutional criticism are always called for.
67. Not all who call themselves Christian deserve that name just as "not all who say 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven" (Jesus).
68. Paedophilia is a terrible wrong, but its cover-up by hierarchy is even more despicable.

69. Loyalty and obedience are never greater virtues than conscience and justice.
70. Jesus said nothing about condoms, birth control, or homosexuality.
71. A church that is more preoccupied with sexual wrongs than with injustice is itself sick.
72. Since homosexuality is found among 464 species and in 8 percent of any given human population, it is altogether natural, for those who are born that way are; a gift from God and nature to the greater community.
73. Homophobia in any form is a serious sin against love of neighbour, a sin of ignorance of the richness and diversity of God's creation, and a sin of exclusion.
74. Racism, sexism, and militarism are also serious sins.
75. Poverty for many and luxury for the few are not right or sustainable.
76. Consumerism is today's version of gluttony and needs to be confronted by creating an economic system that works for all peoples and all earth's creatures.
77. Seminaries as we know them, with their excessive emphasis on left-brain work, often kill and corrupt the mystical soul of the young instead of encouraging the mysticism and prophetic consciousness that is there. They should be replaced by wisdom schools.
78. Inner work is required of us all. Therefore, spiritual practices of meditation should be available to all, and this helps in calming the reptilian brain. Silence or contemplation and learning to be still can and ought to be taught to all children and adults.
79. Outer work needs to flow from our inner work, just as action flows from non-action and true action from being.

80. A wise test of right action is this: What is the effect of this action on people seven generations from today?
81. Another test of right action is this: Is what I am doing, is what we are doing, beautiful or not?
82. *Eros*, the passion for living, is a virtue that combats *acedia*, or the lack of energy to begin new things, also expressed as depression, cynicism, or sloth (and also known as *couchpotatois*).
83. The dark night of the soul descends on us all and the proper response is not addiction, such as shopping, alcohol, drugs, but rather to be with the darkness and learn from it.
84. The dark night of the soul is a learning place of great depth. Stillness is required.
85. Not only is there a dark night of the soul, but also a dark night of society and a dark night of our species.
86. Chaos is a friend and a teacher and an integral part or prelude to new birth. Therefore, it is not to be feared or compulsively controlled.
87. Authentic science can and must be one of humanity's sources of wisdom, for it is a source of sacred awe, childlike wonder, and truth.
88. When science teaches that matter is "frozen light", it is freeing human thought from scapegoating flesh as something evil and instead reassuring us that all things are light. This same teaching is found in the Christian gospels (Christ is the light in all things) and in Buddhist teaching (the Buddha nature is in all things). Therefore, flesh does not sin; it is our choices that are sometimes off center.
89. The proper objects of the human heart are truth and justice (Thomas Aquinas), and all people have a right to these through healthy education and healthy government.
90. God is one name for the Divine One; there are an infinite number of names for God and the Godhead, and still God

“has no name and will never be given a name” (Meister Eckhart).

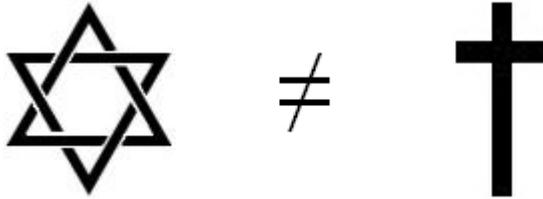
91. Three highways into the heart are silence and love and grief.
92. The grief in the human heart needs to be attended to by rituals and practices that, when practiced, will lessen anger and allow creativity to flow anew.
93. Two highways out of the heart are creativity and acts of justice and compassion.
94. Since angels learn exclusively by intuition, when we develop our powers of intuition, we can expect to meet angels along the way.
95. True intelligence includes feeling, sensitivity, beauty, the gift of nourishment, and humour, which is a gift of the Spirit (paradox being its sister).

## Appendix B

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### **Why Don't Jews Believe In Jesus?**



#### **Jewish Beliefs About Jesus and Jews For Jesus**

#### **For 2,000 years, Jews have rejected the Christian idea of Jesus as Messiah. Why?**

It is important to understand why Jews don't believe in Jesus. The purpose is not to disparage other religions, but rather to clarify the Jewish position. The more data that's available, the better-informed choices people can make about their spiritual path.

#### **Jews do not accept Jesus as the Messiah because**

What exactly is the Messiah?

The word "Messiah" is an English rendering of the Hebrew word "Mashiach", which means "Anointed." It usually refers to a person initiated into God's service by being anointed with oil. (Exodus 29:7, I Kings 1:39, II Kings 9:3)

Since every King and High Priest was anointed with oil, each may be referred to as "an anointed one" (a Mashiach or a Messiah). For example: "God forbid that I [David] should stretch out my hand against the Lord's Messiah [Saul]..." (I Samuel 26:11. Cf. II Samuel 23:1, Isaiah 45:1, Psalms 20:6)

Where does the Jewish concept of Messiah come from? One of the central themes of Biblical prophecy is the promise of a future age of perfection characterized by universal peace and recognition of God. (Isaiah 2:1-4; Zephaniah 3:9; Hosea 2:20-22; Amos 9:13-15; Isaiah 32:15-18, 60:15-18; Micah 4:1-4; Zechariah 8:23, 14:9; Jeremiah 31:33-34)

Many of these prophetic passages speak of a descendant of King David who will rule Israel during the age of perfection. (Isaiah 11:1-9; Jeremiah 23:5-6, 30:7-10, 33:14-16; Ezekiel 34:11-31, 37:21-28; Hosea 3:4-5)

Since every King is a Messiah, by convention, we refer to this future anointed king as The Messiah. The above is the only description in the Bible of a Davidic descendant who is to come in the future. We will recognize the Messiah by seeing who the King of Israel is at the time of complete universal perfection.

### **1) Jesus did not fulfill the Messianic prophecies**

What is the Messiah supposed to accomplish? The Bible says that he will:

- A. Build the Third Temple (Ezekiel 37:26-28).
- B. Gather all Jews back to the Land of Israel (Isaiah 43:5-6).
- C. Usher in an era of world peace, and end all hatred, oppression, suffering and disease. As it says; "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall man learn war anymore." (Isaiah 2:4)
- D. Spread universal knowledge of the God of Israel, which will unite humanity as one. As it says: "God will be King over all the world—on that day, God will be One and His Name will be One" (Zechariah 14:9).

The historical fact is that Jesus fulfilled none of these messianic prophecies.

Christians counter that Jesus will fulfil these in the Second Coming, but Jewish sources show that the Messiah will fulfil the prophecies outright, and no concept of a second coming exists.

## **2) Jesus did not embody the personal qualifications of Messiah**

### **A. Messiah as prophet**

Jesus was not a prophet. Prophecy can only exist in Israel when the land is inhabited by a majority of world Jewry. During the time of Ezra (circa 300 BCE), when the majority of Jews refused to move from Babylon to Israel, prophecy ended upon the death of the last prophets—Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

Jesus appeared on the scene approximately 350 years after prophecy had ended.

### **B. Descendent of David**

According to Jewish sources, the Messiah will be born of human parents and possess normal physical attributes like other people. He will not be a demi-god, nor will he possess supernatural qualities.

The Messiah must be descended on his father's side from King David (see Genesis 49:10 and Isaiah 11:1). According to the Christian claim that Jesus was the product of a virgin birth, he had no father—and thus could not have possibly fulfilled the messianic requirement of being descended on his father's side from King David!

### **C. Torah Observance**

The Messiah will lead the Jewish people to full Torah observance. The Torah states that all mitzvot (commandments) remain binding forever, and anyone coming to change the Torah is immediately identified as a false prophet. (Deut. 13:1-4)

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus contradicts the Torah and states that its commandments are no longer applicable. (see John 1:45 and 9:16, Acts 3:22 and 7:37) For example; John 9:14 records that Jesus made a paste in violation of Shabbat, which caused the Pharisees to say (verse 16) "He does not observe Shabbat!"

## **3) Mistranslated verses "referring" to Jesus**

Biblical verses can only be understood by studying the original Hebrew text—which reveals many discrepancies in the Christian translation.

### A. Virgin Birth

The Christian idea of a virgin birth is derived from the verse in Isaiah 7:14 describing an “alma” as giving birth. The word "alma" has always meant a young woman, but Christian theologians came centuries later and translated it as "virgin." This accords Jesus’ birth with the first century pagan idea of mortals being impregnated by gods.

### B. Crucifixion

The verse in Psalms 22:17 reads: “Like a lion, they are at my hands and feet.” The Hebrew word ki-ari (like a lion) is grammatically similar to the word "gouged." Thus Christianity reads the verse as a reference to crucifixion: "They pierced my hands and feet."

### C. Suffering Servant

Christianity claims that Isaiah chapter 53 refers to Jesus, as the “suffering servant.”

In actuality, Isaiah 53 directly follows the theme of chapter 52, describing the exile and redemption of the Jewish people. The prophecies are written in the singular form because the Jews (“Israel”) are regarded as one unit. The Torah is filled with examples of the Jewish nation referred to with a singular pronoun.

Ironically, Isaiah’s prophecies of persecution refer in part to the 11th century when Jews were tortured and killed by Crusaders who acted in the name of Jesus.

From where did these mistranslations stem? St. Gregory, 4th century Bishop of Nazianzus, wrote: “A little jargon is all that is necessary to impose on the people. The less they comprehend, the more they admire.”

## **4) Jewish belief is based solely on national revelation**

Of the 15,000 religions in human history; only Judaism bases its belief on national revelation; i.e. God speaking to the entire nation. If God is going to start a religion, it makes sense He’ll tell everyone, not just one person.

Throughout history, thousands of religions have been started by individuals, attempting to convince people that he or she is God’s true prophet. But personal revelation is an extremely weak basis for a

religion because one can never know if it is indeed true. Since others did not hear God speak to this person, they have to take his word for it. Even if the individual claiming personal revelation performs miracles, there is still no verification that he is a genuine prophet. Miracles do not prove anything. All they show—assuming they are genuine—is that he has certain powers. It has nothing to do with his claim of prophecy.

Judaism, unique among all of the world's major religions, does not rely on "claims of miracles" as the basis for its religion. In fact, the Bible says that God sometimes grants the power of "miracles" to charlatans, in order to test Jewish loyalty to the Torah (Deut. 13:4).

Maimonides states (Foundations of Torah, chap. 8):

The Jews did not believe in Moses, our teacher, because of the miracles he performed. Whenever anyone's belief is based on seeing miracles, he has lingering doubts, because it is possible the miracles were performed through magic or sorcery. All of the miracles performed by Moses in the desert were because they were necessary, and not as proof of his prophecy.

What then was the basis of [Jewish] belief? The Revelation at Mount Sinai, which we saw with our own eyes and heard with our own ears, not dependent on the testimony of others... as it says, "Face to face, God spoke with you..." The Torah also states: "God did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us—who are all here alive today." (Deut. 5:3)

Judaism is not miracles. It is the personal eyewitness experience of every man, woman and child, standing at Mount Sinai 3,300 years ago.

## **5) Christianity contradicts Jewish theology**

The following theological points apply primarily to the Roman Catholic Church, the largest Christian denomination.

### **A. God as Three?**

The Catholic idea of Trinity breaks God into three separate beings: The Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost (Matthew 28:19).

Contrast this to the Shema, the basis of Jewish belief: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is **one**” (Deut. 6:4). Jews declare the Shema every day, while writing it on doorposts (Mezuzah), and binding it to the hand and head (Tefillin). This statement of God’s One-ness is the first words a Jewish child is taught to say, and the last words uttered before a Jew dies.

In Jewish law, worship of a three-part god is considered idolatry of the three cardinal sins that a Jew should rather give up his life than transgress. This explains why during the Inquisitions and throughout history, Jews gave up their lives rather than convert.

### B. Man as God?

Roman Catholics believe that God came down to earth in human form, as Jesus said: “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).

Maimonides devotes most of the “Guide for the Perplexed” to the fundamental idea that God is incorporeal, meaning that He assumes no physical form. God is Eternal, above time. He is Infinite, beyond space. He cannot be born, and cannot die. Saying that God assumes human form makes God small, diminishing both His unity and His divinity. As the Torah says; “God is not a mortal” (Numbers 23:19).

Judaism says that the Messiah will be born of human parents, and possess normal physical attributes like other people. He will not be a demi-god, and will not possess supernatural qualities. In fact, an individual is alive in every generation with the capacity to step into the role of the Messiah.

### C. Intermediary for Prayer?

The Catholic belief is that prayer must be directed through an intermediary—i.e. confessing one’s sins to a priest. Jesus himself is an intermediary, as Jesus said: “No man cometh unto the Father but by me.”

In Judaism, prayer is a totally private matter, between each individual and God. As the Bible says: “God is near to all who call unto Him” (Psalms 145:18). Further, the Ten Commandments state: “You shall have no other gods **before me**,” meaning that it is forbidden to set up a mediator between God and man.

#### D. Involvement in the physical World

Catholic doctrine often treats the physical world as an evil to be avoided. Mary, the holiest woman, is portrayed as a virgin. Priests and nuns are celibate. And monasteries are in remote, secluded locations.

By contrast, Judaism believes that God created the physical world not to frustrate us, but for our pleasure. Jewish spirituality comes through grappling with the mundane world in a way that uplifts and elevates. Sex in the proper context is one of the holiest acts we can perform.

The Talmud says if a person has the opportunity to taste a new fruit and refuses to do so, he will have to account for that in the world to come. Jewish rabbinical schools teach how to live amidst the bustle of commercial activity. Jews don't retreat from life, we elevate it.

#### 6) Jews and Gentiles

Judaism does not demand that everyone convert to the religion. The Torah of Moses is a truth for all humanity, whether Jewish or not. King Solomon asked God to heed the prayers of non-Jews who come to the Holy Temple (Kings I 8:41-43). The prophet Isaiah refers to the Temple as a "House for all nations."

The Temple service during Sukkot featured 70 bull offerings, corresponding to the 70 nations of the world. The Talmud says that if the Romans would have realized how much benefit they were getting from the Temple, they'd never have destroyed it.

Jews have never actively sought converts to Judaism because the Torah prescribes a righteous path for gentiles to follow, known as the "Seven Laws of Noah." Maimonides explains that any human being who faithfully observes these basic moral laws earns a proper place in heaven.

#### 7) Bringing the Messiah

Maimonides states that the popularity of Christianity (and Islam) is part of God's plan to spread the ideals of Torah throughout the world. This moves society closer to a perfected state of morality and toward a greater understanding of God. All this is in preparation for the Messianic age.

Indeed, the world is in desperate need of Messianic redemption. War and pollution threaten our planet; ego and confusion erode family life. To the extent we are aware of the problems of society, is the extent we will yearn for redemption. As the Talmud says, one of the first questions a Jew is asked on Judgment Day is: “Did you yearn for the arrival of the Messiah?”

How can we hasten the coming of the Messiah? The best way is to love all humanity generously, to keep the mitzvot of the Torah (as best we can), and to encourage others to do so as well.

Despite the gloom, the world does seem headed toward redemption. One apparent sign is that the Jewish people have returned to the Land of Israel and made it bloom again. Additionally, a major movement is afoot of young Jews returning to Torah tradition.

The Messiah can come at any moment, and it all depends on our actions. God is ready when we are. For as King David says: “Redemption will come today—if you hearken to His voice.”

by Rabbi Shraga Simmons

Largely adapted from Aish.com

**Well! Jesus is coming! Whether its the  
First Coming or Second Coming! It no  
longer matters!**

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